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# Oral History of Greta Sebald

Allys Swanson  
*St. Catherine University*

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## ORAL HISTORY OF GRETA SEBALD

**This interview is with Greta Sebal, College of St. Catherine alumnae, class of 1988, and Olympic luge competitor representing Greece in the 1994 Olympic games in Lillehammer, Norway. The interviewer is Allys Swanson, Associate Professor of the Exercise and Sport Science Department at the College of St. Catherine.**

Allys: Greta, I'd like to begin by asking you to talk about your family and some of your early childhood memories.

Greta: Well, I was born on November 18, 1965. My parents are Roy and Margaret Sebal, and I have an older sister, Gail, and an older brother, Greg. I'm the youngest. I grew up in the small town of Askov, with a population of approximately three hundred and fifty people. It is located about a hundred miles north of the Twin Cities. I had a good childhood.

Allys: What kind of family values do you recall, and what are some experiences from your early days?

Greta: We grew up a good Catholic family, and I can remember playing a lot with the neighborhood kids. Being in a small town, you know everybody, and everybody knows you; so we knew all the kids in town. We used to play outside, a lot of "kick-the-can" or "hide-and-go-seek," those kinds of games.

Allys: How many years older than you is your brother?

Greta: He was born in 1963, so he's about two and a half years older than I am.

Allys: And your sister?

Greta: My sister was born in 1959, so she's a little over six years older than I am.

Allys: Was your relationship with your brother stronger than with your sister?

Greta: I would say it used to be stronger with my sister, and then once I began pursuing the Olympics, then it became much stronger with my brother. Now I'm definitely a lot closer to my brother than my sister. We always got along very well as a family and have always been very supportive of one another and of our endeavors. I think my parents sometimes thought the things I do are kind of crazy.

Allys: Did your mother work out of the home? Or did your father work in the town?

Greta: My father owns a Ford dealership and body shop that his father started in town. My mother, for as long as I can remember, has always done the books for the business; so despite, quote-unquote, working out of the home, she actually worked in the home. Oddly enough, I never thought of her as working, because she was always home when I left for school in the morning and when I came back in the afternoon. She always had time for us and went to every single sporting event that I was ever in.

Allys: What were your early sports experiences in school?

Greta: When I was old enough to get into organized sports in school, I always participated in volleyball, basketball and track. Usually what I did in track was the shot-put and discus, occasionally the long jump and once in awhile competed in a short running event.

Allys: What grade was this?

Greta: Well, I started volleyball and basketball in seventh grade and played through twelfth grade. Track, I just did a partial season, I believe, in eighth grade and then I did it again in my junior and senior year in high school.



Allys: What do you recall from those sport experiences that may have been of a lasting value? Or, maybe any negative experiences?

Greta: The one thing about growing up in a small town is that you have the opportunity to play. Everybody gets to play, because you don't have a choice of participants. I really was fortunate to be able to have as much activity as I did. Also, growing up in a small town, the community and the school is always supportive of the athletic sports. Later on, I found I got that same support when we were in the Olympics, the community was behind us. It was very beneficial to that extent. Like in any sport, you learn to play on a team, but I also found, as an individual, it is what you make of it. I would often, for track and field, start training as soon as the basketball season ended and I would begin training right away, even though there was usually a month-long break. I would train everyday, while most of the other students waited until the official training started, and I found out that what you get out of it is what you put into it. Which is really like anything.

Allys: What about the other extracurricular activities in your school? You mentioned you were in a small town and everyone participated.

Greta: Well, I pretty much did everything there was to do in school, because there was nothing else to do in town. I was very active in things such as the Future Homemakers of America [FHA] and, not so much, student government, although I was class president for three or four years in a row.

Allys: Which years were those?

Greta: I want to say eighth through tenth grade, or something like that. I'm not sure. I was always involved with music. I played piano and saxophone; so I was always



the lead chair. I was always in choir and jazz band and participated in state music competitions for piano and then also for saxophone. I accompanied for many people as well.

Allys: Do you still play the saxophone?

Greta: I haven't since I graduated high school, but I still have it in my closet.

Allys: How would you rank music and sport?

Greta: Growing up, they were a very big part of my life, just for the social aspect of it. The school was not a challenge to me. Being a small town, there never was much funding, so there wasn't a large choice of classes and very few challenging classes. Also, I've always been a really active person, so I found that it was important for me to have something to do, something to challenge myself. Music and sports were really important to me and a very big part of my life growing up.

Allys: Was this a public school, and what was the size of your senior class?

Greta: Yes, and my senior graduating class was twenty-four. Only twenty-three spoke English; two were exchange students; eighteen were girls; six were guys.

Allys: Where were the exchange students from?

Greta: One was from Italy, and the other one I think was from South America. I don't know, we couldn't understand him, so I'm not sure. I did very well in my grades; I was valedictorian and I always got A's. I always seemed to excel; I don't like to say that, but I did very well in things from sports to music to academics. The one challenging thing was it seemed like everyone was always out to get me, that I was the person to beat. On one hand, it was a compliment, but on the other hand, it hurt. When my peers beat me in something, they would make such a big deal about it, and I would actually feel bad

about the whole thing. I guess on the other hand, it is just in how they look at you, too. I really didn't care for that either, but I didn't ever try to rub it in anybody's face. It was just a thing they put upon themselves to beat me. I guess that's what they needed for a goal.

Allys: What about volunteer activities? As you mentioned, you grew up in a small town and funding wasn't necessarily terrific. How early in your life did your love of volunteer activities develop?

Greta: I don't know if I could put an age on it, but I've always gotten a lot of gratification out of helping people. I started out young, as a Brownie and then a Girl Scout. There weren't really a lot of volunteer opportunities. You did certain activities through school, FHA and such, where you would help different people in the community or groups in the community. I also had, growing up, a lot of elderly relatives, great aunts and uncles and grandparents, who also needed a lot of help. I felt like we were always moving someone to the nursing home or taking someone to the doctor or hospital. I didn't really even get into as much formal volunteering, I guess, until I went to college and beyond.

Allys: Is there any high school experience, either academic, leadership, sports or music, that stands out as a highlight?

Greta: Well, there were definitely highlights and different events. An experience that meant a lot to me was being voted captain, because that's something my teammates did; they had confidence in me and in my leadership abilities, and that meant a lot. My junior year in track was really, truly my first year in track and in shot put. I took second in district and made it on to the regional level. I didn't make it beyond there, but

considering it was my first time at it, I thought it was pretty good. Then when I played basketball, our team won the district conference, which was like winning an Olympic gold medal for our school. They hadn't won a district-level anything in forty years, or something like that, so that was a big deal. It meant a lot to be a part of that. Like I said, academically I did well; I was valedictorian. On one hand it felt good. I won a number of awards, and probably one of the most important was the Daughters of the American Revolution [DAR] award, and the reason that one was good was my classmates, as well as teachers, voted for the recipient of that. Once again, I felt that was a sign of respect.

Allys: Did you give a valedictorian speech?

Greta: I did, actually; it was about ice cream. Obviously, I'm not a very serious person. It was two salutatorians and myself who were speaking. I remember the one salutatorian said, 'My goal is to make everybody cry.'

I said, 'Well my goal is to make everyone laugh.' I had, the previous year, worked at a Hagen-Dazs ice cream shop, so I got up and gave this speech that my philosophy on life is that life is like an ice cream shop. Everyone is like a different flavor ice cream in the shop; some are a little fruity, some are a little nutty. Then I went on to analyze some of the different flavors and said that together our class made a good lollapalooza. I think my closing comment to my classmates was that I just wanted them to remember that no matter what they do, don't wait too long, because time, like ice cream, melts away.

Allys: Oh! Wise words! Wise words for a senior in high school.

Greta: Yeah. The one thing I know is I couldn't wait to get out of town. It was like, 'Well, it was good.' It was hard for me, too, because I was what you call a good kid.



I wouldn't go out and drink, I wouldn't go out and smoke. I never went out and partied; I always baby-sat or did whatever. I think I had a hard time connecting with a lot of the kids, because most of them did do that. I couldn't wait to get out of town so that I could explore more of the world that didn't involve a can of beer or peer pressure, or things of that nature.

Allys: In your exploring of the world, did your exposure to the international students have any part in that?

Greta: Well, actually, while I was growing up, my family hosted an exchange student through AFS for a year; Rob Terwijn, who was from Holland. He stayed with us for a year when I was in seventh grade. And, since Rob had lived with my family, I became very involved with AFS and met a lot of different exchange students. We usually had two exchange students at our school each year, and I usually got involved. Growing up in a small town, I was actually very sheltered from international things; I didn't really have a lot of exposure, even growing up with my family, where my mother is Greek. We didn't even practice the German traditions from my dad's side. My hometown was Danish, so I grew up with Danish traditions more than anything else. I know how to prepare more Danish food and dance around the Christmas tree, more than any of my own heritage.

Allys: Before we leave the high school part, are there any other sports activities or experiences that you'd like to share?

Greta: Well, I guess I would say I was pretty determined, and I don't know if rough would be a good word . . .but throughout my career, I don't know how many sprained ankles I had. I also damaged my thumb in volleyball in my sophomore year and

then broke my nose playing basketball. The next year I came out, broke my nose again, but that time didn't have it fixed. In my senior year, I got whiplash playing basketball. I had to wear a collar for a while and I couldn't play any games, but I can remember going to practice and actually wearing the whiplash collar while I was practicing. In the particular game when I got injured, I blacked out and was lying flat on the basketball court and eventually got off the court only to wait before going back into the game. I went to the doctor later and discovered that I had gotten a concussion and whiplash during the game. Oftentimes, when I would get a sprained ankle, I would go back into the game later on because I just didn't want to give up quite so easily.

Allys: How did the whiplash accident happen?

Greta: In that particular case, I was down on one end of the court, and all the activity was down on the other, and there were a few other players from the opposing team by me. Someone threw the ball down to our end, and I bent down to pick up the ball. At that particular moment, two members of the other team crashed into each other and my head got between their two hips. My head was crushed, and I lost control of the ball. I found that, in a way, my injury didn't make me angry, but it just kind of gave me more reason to continue on and it pushed me harder.

Allys: How did you choose St. Catherine's?

Greta: I did for a couple of different reasons. First of all, my dad had gone to St. Thomas and my aunt had gone to St. Kate's, and my sister was going to St. Catherine's for Weekend College. At first I didn't even consider the school. I wanted to go to a smaller state school, then transfer to the University of Minnesota. Then I got an application and information in the mail that my aunt had signed me up for. I came down



to take a look at the school once. I came with my parents, and I instantly fell in love with the campus. I felt like it was a small community, and I liked the size because it was small. It reminded me of a small town, and I didn't want to get completely engulfed and completely lost at a school. I wanted a school that would provide me the big city opportunities, and yet had the small school opportunities, because I was used to that. I was very impressed with their academic record and the extra curricular activities, and of things that they offered, both socially and spiritually as well. As it ended up, St. Kate's was the only school I even applied to. Fortunately, I was accepted into it, and I know my parents were very supportive of that decision. Plus, my sister only lived six blocks away, which I think really helped, but by the time I started school, she had moved away.

Allys: Looking back on your college experiences, what do you value? Or, what did you value then?

Greta: There were a lot of things that I valued. I think St. Kate's was a perfect choice for me. It was a wonderful school. I really got to know my strengths: what I could do, where I could go. I made some wonderful friends, lifelong friendships that have been supportive to me, both in school back then and now. They're still continuing to support me. I really feel like I got a quality education. I was very pleased with the amount of support and interaction I had with the professors and I still keep in touch with some of the professors. I was able to get involved in a number of different activities at school, which I think helped to develop my skills further, as well as some of my leadership abilities. I got to explore new interests, new opportunities. I lived in Whitby Hall for the first two years, and Whitby was the international dorm. I don't know if it still is, or not, but I made a lot of international friends, which gave me my first true



experience of different cultures. I made some very good friends that way with whom I still keep in touch, and have visited.

Allys: “Who are the professors with whom you still keep in touch? Were they in your major?”

Greta: I ended up graduating with a business degree with focuses in both finance and marketing, and also an economics degree. I kept in touch with some of the professors within the business department. I also worked on campus in a couple of different positions, one being at the O’Neill Learning Center. I kept in touch with some of the staff there, and some of the other staff on campus as well as even some of the administration; Colleen Hegranes and a few of the other staff. I made a lot of friendships, and not just from students.

Allys: What, looking at your college experience today, would you say you value? I mean, you valued those at the time you were there, but now looking back what do you value?

Greta: I think that what I came away with, if I look back now, is confidence. The one thing I think St. Kate’s promotes and instills is confidence in yourself, confidence as a woman, and the message of ‘Don’t be afraid to succeed. Go after whatever you want.’ I know that, primarily, they support the fact that women can do anything, that women can get in the workforce, and they can make differences. Yes, as a woman I can do that, but even just as an individual, I really felt they were constantly giving this message ‘Go after what you want. Dream big, and go for it.’ Even at that time, my dreams were a lot different than they are now or what I eventually would have dreams to be, but that was

the one thing that I know I came away with. I don't want to say that I felt like I could do anything, but I felt I could try anything, or just about anything.

Allys: How about your professional career? You majored in business, so how has that developed?

Greta: Well, at first when I came to St. Kate's, I was going to go into computers. I don't know why, because I knew nothing about them except that I liked playing a couple games on them. Then I decided to get into business. I wanted to be this big stockbroker, and make all this money, so I started to work toward a finance degree. I had taken an economics course, and could say 'Oh, this is kind of fun', and it overlapped a lot. After a while, I decided I was going to get a major in business and the minor in economics. Eventually, I changed that to a double major, because there were only a few class differences and I got involved in the investment club, where I was president and joined the business club. Then I just decided it wasn't creative enough for me. I didn't want to deal with money and numbers. I wanted something that would tap into my creative side, so the summer between my junior and senior year I decided to quickly pick up a marketing major. I actually had enough credits to graduate with the double major in three and a half years, so I had plenty of time. I had an internship at an ad agency, too.

Allys: What about sports while you were at St. Catherine's?

Greta: I wasn't participating in any sports, except for in a few intramural powder puff football games, and once in awhile I played volleyball. I played in some volleyball leagues in bars, or once a week there'd be a group of people that would get together to play. I did a lot of walking with friends and would play tennis. I took the required physical education classes; one was fencing. Really, my athletic side pretty much



dropped off. I used to go biking quite a bit, but it wasn't where I was in anything competitive at that point.

Allys: But it was interesting to learn fencing, right?

Greta: Oh, I loved it! I like to try new things. I'm always interested in going to new restaurants, or trying new activities, or hearing something different, or traveling to a new country. I always enjoy trying to learn something new of that nature. I don't know if I was any good or not, but that wasn't the point.

Allys: After you graduated, you took a trip to Greece. Let's talk about that.

Greta: Actually, after I graduated I had only been out of the country once and that was during my sophomore year. I went to study in Paris to finish off my fourth semester requirement in French. Then I had gone up to Holland to visit the exchange student that lived with my family in seventh grade; I saw him for a weekend. For whatever reason, I wanted to go back, so I decided to backpack for three months in Europe. When I left, I decided I was only going to be gone for three months. I started out with two friends, and eventually I was down to just myself. One friend left after a month, and then the second friend thought we were going to get blown up in Europe. At the time, an Iranian passenger plane was shot down by a U.S. air force plane, or something. We were in Stockholm, and just on our way to start heading down to Greece, where we were going to take a two-week tour, when a boat that was blown up in Greece. My friend thought for sure that we were going to get blown up, so she left, and I was on my own.

I went to Greece, and on this tour, I had decided that I wanted to go and find my Greek roots. My grandfather, my mother's father, came from Greece in about 1919, and he died when my mom was only three. None of the Greek traditions, or Greek



information on the Greek side of our family was passed on like a lot of foreigners who came to this country—they came to become Americanized. They didn't speak their native languages; they were trying to learn English, and the Greek tradition wasn't passed on. My grandfather came with three other brothers, but even those brothers didn't pass anything on. Eventually, they had all passed away, and we knew nothing about our Greek heritage.

Allys: How did they come to Minnesota?

Greta: They first went into New York, and then somehow they ended up, I believe, in Milaca. Then somehow my grandfather ended up in Hinckley, and that's where he met my grandmother.

My parents, and that entire generation, had no interest in their Greek heritage. It was just not something that they did, however, it was my generation, my brother, a cousin, and myself, who took a lot stronger interest and more pride in our Greek heritage. We started to look into it more. The Greek family was called the Marudas family. We started having a family reunion every year for my grandmother's birthday, but then we started calling it, instead of the Marudas family reunion, we started calling it the Marudarama. We started making this a bigger and bigger event; we actually have tournaments every year for cribbage, shuffleboard, croquet, fishing and a water expo, and we actually give trophies. It got to be a real big thing, and we started to take more pride in our Greek heritage. I decided that when I was in Greece I wanted to, quote-unquote, find my roots. The only information I had was my grandfather's name, the name of his parents, the fact that he was from a large family, the village and the island where he was born, and that's all I knew.

Allys: What was the name of the island?

Greta: Zakynthos, and the village where he was born was, Kiliomeno. When I finished this two-week tour, not knowing any Greek, I found out where this island was and I bought a plane ticket. I knew nothing about it. I met a couple from Arizona in the airport, and they had a book on all the Greek isles. I quickly read about the island, wrote down the name of a cheap hotel, where the tourist information office was, and the name of a good beach. That's all I had. While I was on this plane and I met a family from Toronto, and this little girl was sitting next to me. I got off into this airport in the middle of absolutely nowhere, and then I asked myself, 'Well, where do I go from here?' There was one bus, so I got on it and figured, 'well, I have got to go somewhere other than here.' It ended up taking me into the main city where I got off and I was asking where the police station was, because that's where tourist information was. However, I soon discovered on this island, because it's not a "touristy" island, not many people spoke English. I eventually got to this police station, and there was a policeman standing there. He said, 'May I help you?'

I said, 'Um, tourist information.'

He said, 'It's closed.'

I said, 'Closed? When does it open?'

He said, 'It won't open. It's closed. Can I help you with anything else? Do you need a place to stay?'

I said, 'Yeah.'

He said, 'I can't help you.'

I thought, 'Thanks.' I said, 'Where can I find a map?' He just pointed to the streets. I thought, 'Well, at least I'll get this cheap hotel.' I went and I bought a map, and the saleswoman didn't speak English. I discovered the street I needed wasn't even on the map. As she was talking to this other person, I finally figured out where the hotel was. I headed out; the map was in the English alphabet, but the street signs were in the Greek alphabet. I was going along and I asked these butchers, trying to find this place. Eventually I went back and forth, and I found it. Finally while standing in front of this hotel, I discovered it was closed, due to renovations. I thought, 'I'm not doing very well.' Then I just started walking around, and I knew that in Greece, like a lot of countries, people just rent out rooms. I started asking around, but I wasn't really finding any safe place. For the first night, I just checked into a pension. I thought, 'I'll go down to city records.' I headed down to city records, which was a block or two away. I walked in, and there was the tourist information office. Now this was not a big town. This was a matter of blocks from the police station. I went in there, and I found a woman named Olga, who spoke some English, but not real fluently. I told her what I was there for, and she had agreed to help me try to find my relatives. Then I also asked her about a place to stay. She said she had a room to rent, so I said, 'Okay.'

She said, 'Come back the next day.'

I went back the next day, and I moved to her home; I was only going to be on the island for a week. She lived in a home with her mother next to her, her sister and husband behind her, and her brother and his wife above her. I got to know this family; they had some children and I would teach the girls Girl Scout songs and games that I knew. They were helping me, and what I soon discovered was the name Marudas is a



very common name in Greece, like Smith is in the U.S. Not really having much information to go on, they finally agreed the last night before I was supposed to leave the island, that we'd go up to this village, Kiliomeno.

We headed up to this tiny village up in the mountains, stopped at a little coffee shop, and they talked to this woman. Of course, no one bothered to translate for me. I was just sitting there, and they were yakking away. Then all of a sudden, the owner of the coffee shop would send out some kid, and then he'd come back with some elderly person. They would be talking, and pretty soon the kid would be off, getting somebody else. Nobody was telling me what was happening. Finally, they got the local Orthodox priest. Then, we went over to the church, looked in the church, and there was this woman about my mother's age, who just seemed very happy to see me. Nobody had bothered to tell me that this was my mother's cousin. I didn't know, and I said, 'Oh, hello.' I still didn't know any Greek. Then we were heading to this home, which was about fifty feet away from where we were sitting and I discovered that this was the home of Pavlos, who was my grandfather's youngest brother. Pavlos means Paul in English. He was eighty-eight years old at the time, and he didn't know I existed, and I didn't know he existed. We got in there, and finally someone explained to me that this was the man for whom I was looking, not knowing for whom I was looking. He started crying, and I started crying, and so we were sitting there and we were talking, but we didn't stay for very long. I knew that I wouldn't get back there for awhile, so the next day I gave up my plane ticket. I was supposed to go back to Athens and up to London. I gave up my plane ticket, and I stayed another week. I ended up going back up there for a couple days, and I

brought a little eight-year-old girl with me to translate. I got to stay and visit with him and his daughter and a few other relatives.

Allys: What were some of the stories he told you?

Greta: One of the interesting things was that he could still, despite his age, remember the day my grandfather left. It was my grandfather and three brothers that left when he was eight years old. He said he could still remember clearly when they left, and he said afterwards he cried for ten days straight.

Allys: Why did they leave?

Greta: To go to America and make all this money. They thought that they would make all this money, send the money back, and eventually go back to Greece, but they didn't. What happened was they came to the U.S. but didn't make as much money as they thought, and then never came back. They never went back to visit, and the thing that Pavlos was very bitter about was: why didn't his brothers write to them? Why didn't his brothers go back to see them? Family is very, very important to him, and to the Greek culture in general, and he was very upset by the fact that he had lost touch with these brothers and that we didn't know anything about the family. That was the thing that I came away with, more than anything. He wanted answers, and I said, 'I don't have answers. That's a couple generations from me and things were different back then.'

Allys: Now, was he single or married?

Greta: No, he was married. His wife was still alive at the time. They were just this typical old European couple. He looked like Santa Claus without the beard, and just was as cute as could be, and he and his wife were very sweet. In honor of my arrival, we



had goat, which was a big deal. They killed a goat for me. And I was like, 'Well you could've saved the goat. That was very nice, but not necessary.'

They were very hospitable and I think he was extremely touched by my visit. He asked a lot of questions about the family and said, 'Well, why hasn't anyone come sooner?' I did have a cousin who returned a few years later, and then after the Olympics, both my brother and I went back to visit. That's the first time my brother had met them. Since then, Pavlos' wife had died but Pavlos was still alive. Then we met more relatives, and more cousins.

Allys: Talk about the second time you went back to Greece after the Olympics.

Greta: Well, the time after the Olympics was my second trip to Greece. I had only gone to see Pavlos twice. It was the first time my brother had met them and at that point, we were actually somewhat celebrities. I don't know if I would say celebrities, but there were news stories on us, both on television and in the newspapers. Then here was Pavlos who, I'm sure, has never once had his name in the newspaper except maybe when his parents had died, or his wife had died. He grew grapevines. He was a farmer, and was very poor all of his life. Unfortunately, he didn't have much to show for his efforts in terms of money or material goods, but he had a very big heart. It was interesting to go back there, and after they had heard all about us, and seen us on the news and seen us in the newspaper. When I was at the Olympics, I was telling the Greek press my story about how I found Pavlos, so they ran this story. All of a sudden, this ninety-two-year-old man, or however old he was at the time had his name in all these national newspapers and he became known because of all of these stories. I think they thought it was really quite something that these relatives were all over the news. Yet, when you went to visit



them, it was such a small, tiny, tiny town. I don't even think Pavlos had running water in his home. In a way, I don't think they understood the magnitude of it, because the Winter Olympics are just not nearly as celebrated as the Summer Olympics are in Greece. The Olympics are important but they just don't have that many athletes; they've never done well in the Winter Olympics. I think they didn't really know how to respond to us coming as these somewhat-celebrities, these foreigners, and yet relatives. They were very hospitable, though, and very interested in us and in the family and very welcoming. It was a wonderful experience.

Allys: Did you stay with them in their home?

Greta: Yes. In fact, the first day that we arrived, we had checked into a pension the first night. We had gone to see my old friend, Olga, who had originally found my relatives, and she was very instrumental in getting our citizenship. Without her, I don't think we would have gotten our citizenship. We had seen her and then called the relatives just to say that we were there. As soon as they found that out, they came into town and picked us up. They insisted we check out of the hotel and one of Pavlos' sons was building a home next to his, and so we stayed in his home there. They were very nice to us. I couldn't understand anything they were saying.

Allys: Let's go back and talk about this whole Olympic experience. You could just begin with how it started.

Greta: Alright. Well, I guess I'd have to say that I'd never had specific Olympic dreams, where I thought, 'Okay, I'm starting this sport because I want to become world class and I want to get to the Olympics.' I think like most people, when I'd watch the Olympics, I thought, 'Oh, wouldn't that be a wonderful experience?' I always had little

fantasies about it, but I never really dreamed in terms of a reality type of a dream.

Sometimes I go through times in my life when I feel like I'm just going through the motions of life. I'm not really living; I don't feel alive. I remember going through one of these times, and it was just shortly after the 1992 Olympics, which were in Albertville. I was working as a marketing manager for United Way in St. Paul. My brother Greg called me up one afternoon and he said, 'Hey, how would you like to go to the next Winter Olympics?'

I said, 'Sure. You know I'd love to watch some skiing and skating,' and blah, blah, blah.

He said, 'No, I mean to participate.'

I said, 'Okay. Well, how do you anticipate this is going to happen?'

He said, 'You know, I was watching the last Olympics. I watching this Italian hockey team, and there were a lot of Americans and Canadians on the team. They were saying that the reason they could be on the team was that they had a parent or grandparent from that country, and therefore they could get the citizenship or the national status. You know, I was thinking our grandfather came from Greece. All we have to do is become Greek citizens and then get good enough at a sport and there you have it! If I remember correctly, there were only about nine athletes on the Greek team, so it's not like there's a lot of competition to get on the team.'

We were kind of joking about it a little bit, and then we started talking about sports. I said, 'Well, what are we going to do?' Right away we ruled out pairs figure skating. We talked about the different skating events, and we really decided it had to be a sport that probably had the least amount of competition; something where we could, we



were hoping, train for easily in this area. He had shown an interest in bobsled, and then we were talking about luge. I said I really didn't even know what the sport was all about. In the last Olympics, when I watched it, there were two things I remember thinking: 'That's one thing I have no desire to try,' and the other one was: 'There's no way I'd be caught dead on international television wearing that skin-tight rubber suit.' There's no way I was going to wear that and let everyone see every bump and bulge on my body. That's really all I remembered about the sport. We talked about it a little bit, and then we said, 'Well, we need to get more information.' When we hung up I started thinking, 'Okay, well, where can we get information?' Within an hour, I was talking to a former Olympian out at the Olympic training center in Lake Placid; he had competed in some sport. He gave us a list of all the different sports, because we didn't even know what all the different sports were. Then he gave me the address for the International Olympic Committee.

Allys: Now did you just know to call Lake Placid?

Greta: Actually, at first I didn't really know. We had discussed that there was potentially going to be an Olympics up in Alaska. I called up in Alaska somewhere, and they didn't help. I don't know how I got the idea to call Lake Placid, but I just called information, and then they gave me the U.S. Olympic training center. I had no idea at that time that I'd be spending as much time there as I would within the very near future. I called my brother back within an hour and I said, 'Well, okay. Here's the address to the International Olympic Committee, and here are all the sports.'

We talked about it a little bit more, and of course, we were joking about this. We said, 'Okay, we're going to take this as far as we can take it, or until it costs us a hundred



dollars.’ Well we soon spent more than one hundred dollars. My brother sent off a letter to the International Olympic Committee, asking what were the requirements to represent a country. He also sent off a letter to the Greek Embassy in Washington, D.C., asking about getting citizenship for that.

Those were the first two things. Then we started to look into the different sports and agreed that whatever sport we chose to participate in, we have to become world-class athletes in four years.

He said, ‘No, we have two years.’ I didn’t realize it but that’s when they first started alternating, and so there were only two years between the 1992 and 1994 Winter Olympics.

We basically decided on the sports of bobsled and luge because they had the least amount of competition. My brother had a real interest in bobsled, and when we first started pursuing it, we actually wanted to try to do the sport together. The other thing is, there are two kinds of luge. One is on a natural track made out of ice and snow, and the other one is a man-made refrigerated track. There are a couple of different kinds of natural tracks in Michigan, and we were looking into if we could go to Michigan and train. We thought, ‘We could drive to Michigan to train and try to get better.’ We contacted some of the different sport organizations in Michigan, and then we started contacting the United States Luge Association [USLA] in Lake Placid, and also the U.S. Bobsled Federation. When I talked to the USLA, their first question was ‘How old are you?’

I said, ‘Well, I’m twenty-six.’

They said, ‘You’re too old to start.’

I said, 'I appreciate your feedback. However, I'd still like to get more information.'

My brother made most of the contacts. He started with the Canadian Luge and Bobsled Federations, who were more helpful and gave us information to steer us in the right direction. We kept looking into the sport competition requirements and then at the same time we were pursuing our Greek citizenship.

Allys: What month of the year was this?

Greta: Well, when we first started talking about it, I would say it was the end of February or early March. Over the course of time, we were kind of slowly looking into these things. A week would go by and then we would make another phone call. We found out in the middle of the summer that there was actually a luge camp here in Minnesota. 3M used to be very involved, and they used to sponsor camps trying to recruit young children at the ages of eight to twelve to start in the sport. The USLA had camps around the country where they'd go to major cities, put wheels on luge training sleds and then have the kids try it. We found out there was a camp coming to Minneapolis so we contacted the USLA and went down. We actually got to meet coaches before all the kids showed up. They had the training run set up under, I believe it was the Franklin Street bridge, because there was a good hill; they blocked the street off. My brother and I actually got to try it a few times, just on the wheel sled. That's the first time I had actually tried it. Really, at this point, I looked at it and I thought, 'Well that didn't really tell me one thing or another.' I did meet a couple people there that I would eventually see again when I went back to Lake Placid to train.

As we were starting to research things further, we found out that women could not participate in the sport of bobsled, not jointly as a team. My brother felt that he had a better chance, and just was more interested in bobsled, so that kind of forced me to go towards luge. As I started looking into it more, I found I needed to commit more time to training for luge than Greg would for bobsled.

Allys: What's happening in the rest of your life at this time?

Greta: At this time, I was still working full-time at United Way. I was also in graduate school part-time. I was taking classes in the evenings, working on my MBA at the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota. I also started to do a little bit of training, nothing serious.

Allys: This is summer time now.

Greta: Yes, summer of 1992. We had also found out from the Greek Embassy that we had to go through the Greek Consulate in Chicago to try and get our citizenship. We started contacting them and, of course, everything shuts down for family vacations in August in Europe, so our requests were being delayed more and more. We were not getting very many answers; we were not getting a lot of help that we needed. We were just going through the red tape. There was a lot of red tape for everything. We were trying to find out, too, what was required of us to compete and represent Greece in international sports. At this time we had started contacting the International Sports Federations for the respective sports. They were saying you have to have a sports federation, so we were actually looking into maybe having to start a luge federation in Greece, and this would have been even more work. To get some of this stuff accomplished, to contact Greece regarding our citizenship, we started to recruit my friend



Olga, the one who helped me find my relatives, to see if she could be talking to the Ministry for us. While she was looking into it, we had asked our relatives if they would be able to help us, but Olga was actually getting more information for us. She was more helpful than the consulate. At some point, we found a gentleman who would do translations for us. My brother would actually get up and go down to the office at two o'clock in the morning. He would call this translator, who was in Minneapolis, and then they would call Greece in the middle of the night to try to get information, try to get ahead on this citizenship. We were just having a really hard time, and they had to do that many times. They'd have to go in in the middle of the night so that they could try to get the people in the morning.

Allys: Why, because they're eight hours ahead?

Greta: Yes, they're eight hours ahead. It was just very difficult to get to these people. Of course, people were never there when they said they would be there, and things of this nature. We were just finding a lot of red tape just on the sport side of it. On the passport side of it, there were just a lot of frustrations, a lot of people not willing to help. It was a very frustrating time. At this point, too, we were not really telling anybody, either. Well, we didn't tell our parents, because we knew they would not be too supportive of it. We were telling some of our close friends. Everyone, I'm sure, thought we were crazy. Some people, point blank, said, 'Yeah, right. What's the likelihood that you're ever gonna make it there?'

We said, 'Buddy, you know what? We're going to have a good time trying. How many people can say they've tried to get to the Olympics?' That was our ultimate goal. Finally we found out in the summer that there was a USLA luge training program in early

November of 1992, a grassroots program for people who have never tried luge and wanted to try it.

Allys: Where was that program?

Greta: That was in Lake Placid. Both my brother and I signed up, because we still, at this point, had left all options open. He had also been looking into bobsled and he found out that there was a driving school. He also found out that you actually had to have a driver's license to drive a bobsled. That program was in Calgary, later in November of that same year, over Thanksgiving. He decided not to pursue the luge, but to pursue bobsled. About a week before I had to go to Lake Placid, we decided we had to tell our parents what we were doing. I thought, 'Okay, if I'm going to do this then they should really know.'

Allys: This was the fall of 1992.

Greta: Yes, the fall of 1992. My mom and dad knew that there was something up because we had asked for my mom's passport and a copy of her birth certificate. We also had to have her call and get information from the courthouse regarding my grandfather and grandmother. They knew something was up, but we didn't think they knew exactly what. Later on we found out that someone had spilled the beans to them, so they knew exactly what was going on but wouldn't tell us. Eventually when we decided to tell them, we had decided Greg should tell them. I'm always doing something odd like this, but he's the older brother, the stable attorney. They were downtown Minneapolis and they were going to stop in his office, so we felt that was the best time. I can remember the day he told them.'

I said, 'Okay, well as soon as you're done telling them, then you have to call me and tell me what they say.'

Well, he called, but it seemed a little early for him to be calling. He said, 'Hey, guess who's in my office?'

I said, 'Mom and Dad. Have you told them yet?'

He said, 'No.'

The reason they were in the cities was to work on their will. I said, 'Well, is the will done?'

He said, 'No, it's not.'

I said, 'Well, then don't tell them.' I thought for sure that we'd be out of the will, because they might think our plan was crazy. Sure enough, he told them and then he called me. They thought it was an absolutely crazy idea. Because I was in graduate school at the time, their primary concern was that I was going to drop out of school, and that would be the end of the education. As it turned out, it wasn't. Then after that, I had dinner with them; and tried to explain to them why I thought this was an exciting thing. They didn't share in our enthusiasm. They thought it was an absolute crazy idea, very non-practical, and were not supportive of it. I think my mom's biggest fear was that I was going to seriously hurt myself. A lot of it was that they just simply didn't know, but they also didn't ask questions.

I think it was shortly after that, or maybe it was about that time, when I went out to Lake Placid and I tried luge for the first time. I was with a group; there were maybe ten or twelve of us in the group, ranging in age from twelve on up to forty-five. I can remember the first time I got on the sled.



Allys: This is down the ice track.

Greta: This is down the ice track, yeah. They started us about half way up the track, on training sleds, so we went a lot slower. The person who was in charge of our program was Tim Nardiello, who was a two-time U.S. Olympian on the U.S. luge team. The first time down the track, I just pinballed the whole way. I hit every wall there was to hit. When I got done with it, I thought, 'Man, that is the craziest, stupidest thing I've ever done, and I've done a lot of stupid things.' I got out and I thought, 'Okay, okay. I can't give up quite so soon. I'll go down again.' The second time I went down, I just relaxed. I did nothing, really, and I nicked the wall twice. I thought, 'Wow! That's quite the improvement. At this rate, I'll be ready for the Olympics next week.' All week we had been taking training runs, you swear you'd going ninety miles an hour. However, I probably wasn't going more than twenty miles an hour at any point; and I thought I was going so fast. At that time I had absolutely no indication if I'd be good or not, but I was trying to decide whether this was something I was going to have to pursue or not. In order to pursue it, I basically would have to quit my job, take time off of graduate school, train full time, and move to Lake Placid. There was a lot of pressure on me that week to try to figure out if I was good enough or not.

The other hard thing was the people that I was staying with had sort of a bed and breakfast, but it was in their home. The woman was older and she used to luge. They started talking a lot about old luge stories, but then they talked about how there were some Americans who represented other countries. She was very much against that and really cut down a lot of athletes. She gave me a very negative impression.

Allys: What was her name?

Greta: Gigi Jenkins.

Allys: Did she have a title?

Greta: I don't know if she was on the USLA board at that time. She used to luge, and she'd started when she was older, too. She'd started in her thirties, and then she had hurt her knee, or something of that nature. I think she could have potentially gone on to the Olympics back then. They were just very opinionated people, and her husband was very involved. In this home, it was kind of like a boarding home, they had a lot of lugers, kids who would come and stay with them and they would provide meals and lodging for them.

Allys: And they lived in the city of Lake Placid?

Greta: Yes, they were right in Lake Placid. There was this other guy, by the name of Ken Keller, who was about forty-two; he was from Chicago. He and I hit it off, and I would confide in him. It was really getting me down, what Gigi and her husband were saying, and how negative they were. I would think, 'This isn't going to be good.' I knew very well that if I were to get in the sport, I would be doing it on behalf of Greece. They would never consider me on the U.S. team, because I was too old, regardless of how good I was. That was really hard. Right then, I could see where the mental games started to come in. I didn't realize it, but I was going to find this resistance along the whole way, which was really going to be hard.

Anyway, I had gotten to know Tim Nardiello, and I basically went back and I had to decide within a few days if I wanted to pursue this or not. I had also talked with Gunther Lemmener, who was the coach of what is called the FIL team. FIL is the International Luge Federation. There are a lot of small countries that only have one or



two athletes, and they can't afford their own coaching. The FIL provides one coach who coaches all of these small countries, so there might be anywhere from six to twelve or even fourteen athletes. Anyway, he would be my coach eventually, and I would contact him and talk to him. He was Austrian and had basically said I must start training right away, full-time, if I ever wanted to make it to the Olympics. After I got back I contacted Tim Nardiello again. I said, 'This is what I'm thinking of doing, and could you help me with the coaching?'

He said, 'Yes.' He had wanted to start up a new luge club, and when he found out I was in marketing, he said, 'Well, okay. I'll trade you some of my coaching skills for your marketing skills.' Within a few days after I got back, I quit my job at United Way and I arranged to take my final a week early for the marketing class I was taking. I took the winter quarter off, and within two weeks I was off to Calgary. I'm sure people just thought I was off my gourd. I just thought, 'You know what? I might fail, but I'm going to have a heck of a good time trying. How many people can say they've tried this?' I had no idea if I would make it or not, but I thought it's worth the try.

It was at that point that this co-worker at United Way stopped me, and she said, 'I have to tell you I admire you for what you're doing.'

That just totally blew me away, the fact that she used the word 'admire.' I thought, 'This is nothing to admire. This is probably the craziest thing that I'll ever do in my life.' That just totally, totally blew me away.

People got very excited. My friends and former co-workers, they were very excited; and yet my parents still didn't tell anybody. They were not excited. I ended up going up to Calgary to meet Tim who had gone up there with a bunch of teenagers who



were luging. I met up with them in Calgary and I for two weeks. Then I came back home for just a couple days and drove down to Chicago where I met with Ken Keller. Ken Keller's son had been accepted into one of these camps that 3M had been sponsoring so I got down to Chicago and drove out to Lake Placid with them. I trained out in Lake Placid for two weeks.

Allys: What month is this now?

Greta: This is in December; the last two weeks before Christmas, I trained out in Lake Placid and while I was out there I found a place to live and tried to make some arrangements. Again, I was staying with this Gigi Jenkins. At this point she was supportive but she didn't know, and I hadn't told anybody except for my coach, that I was going to do this for Greece; people were fine with it up to this point."

I ended up going home for a couple weeks and then I moved back out. I had found an apartment, and Tim continued to coach and work with me, but he wasn't very good, and he was not trustworthy. The entire time, I felt so much pressure that I put on myself. I was thinking, 'I've got less than a year to qualify for the Olympics. I've got a year to become a world class athlete.' Every run was so important. Every time I went to the track, and every time I took a start practice, there was so much pressure on each run. I think at some point the pressure really got to me. In Lake Placid, I had slid there for so long and never had a crash. Then the first time I had a crash, I ended up in the hospital."

I came out of this curve and basically flipped over. I hit my chin on the wall and it knocked me unconscious. All I can remember was laying there, facedown on the finish curve, and thinking, 'Man! That was a wicked one!' Then I got up, and I remember my balance was off. I lost my sled, and that slid down further on the hill. Then I had taken

off my face shield and I hadn't even looked inside of it. I was walking and I kind of kept tipping over to the side. I felt something was dripping, and I realized it was blood dripping from my chin. Then the track announcer said over the loudspeaker, 'Greta, are you okay?' I waved, and so one of the track workers caught my sled and I got out of the track. I was just standing there and all of the sudden my coach, and other athletes came running down the hill. I thought, 'Why are they running?'

My coach said, 'Would you like to sit down?'

I said, 'Yeah.' I guess I fell over more than sat down. I was sitting on this hill and he took his coat off and put it around me. Then first aid came and they put me on a stretcher and put a collar around me. All I remember is I kept saying, 'This is really stupid. I can walk. Don't tell my mother!'

I kept asking my coach, 'What happened?' I thought I had only asked him once, but I must have asked about ten or twelve times. They got me down and took me by ambulance to the hospital. I ended up cracking open my chin and I don't know how many internal stitches I had, but I had fifteen external ones. They took me to get a CAT scan, and that was fine. It was really hard because all the while I was thinking, 'I'm going to miss valuable training time. I'm gonna miss valuable training time.'

I took about a week off, although I should have taken off much more time because my equilibrium was so thrown off. I went back to the track way too soon. I started sliding and I was crashing left and right. I couldn't have a decent slide, but I didn't realize my whole equilibrium was off. I think I started sliding within three or four days because a week later, there was a race. This race was just for local athletes and in my age category there were only three of us, and I knew that if I finished I'd get a medal. I was



training but crashing all over. I finished the first one but during the second run I was going through an easy part, and I don't know how, but I flipped over. I think I was knocked out a little bit again. I remember there was a track worker there, and he said, 'I'll help you out.'

I was fighting with him. I said, 'No! I have to finish the race! I have to finish the race!' I got back on my sled and I kept going. When I got out of the track, I thought, 'Man, what happened?'

I got down to the warming house, and my coach came in. He said, 'Look at me,' and I looked up and I had a big black eye. I went down to first aid, and he said, 'Go down and get some ice for it.'

In the first aid office and there was a paramedic by the name of Paul who had taken care of me the week before. I walked in and I said, 'Hi, Paul.'

He looked at me and said, 'Oh, no! Not again!' I got to know the paramedics really well. I think a lot of that was there was just so much pressure. What happens in the sport of luge is that it is a sport of time. Most people start sliding when they're ten, twelve years old. They start out slowly, and they have the time to relax and enjoy it and get the skill. It's so important in this sport to be relaxed, and I never got that opportunity to just enjoy it and relax. I felt like I had to get so good so fast and I had to progress so quickly that this pressure was causing me to make mistakes and so I wasn't relaxed or even enjoying it. Also, I knew that there were some people that weren't supporting us.

In the meantime, my brother had gone to bobsled driving school and gotten his license. Then he had gone over and done his first race in Austria because he was required to race in one international race that year. We had also found a Greek federation, an ice



sports federation. Thank goodness that we found that because they had already been established, and they had connections with the International Bobsled and Luge Federations. They arranged it for us to slide in our international competitions and it was at the end of my first season that the World Cup Finale was held in Lake Placid. This was in the end of February, 1993.

About a week prior to the race, or so, was when I finally announced I would slide for Greece. At that point, it didn't go over well with the employees at the United States Luge Association, and a few other people that I knew; this Gigi Jenkins, of course, and a few others. Some of the people that had been supporting me all winter long and who had been my mainstay were resentful that I was doing it for Greece. Some said, 'Good for you. I think it's great.' There were a few supporters, but Gigi was against it, which I knew.

I was talking to her husband and I said, 'I don't look at it as representing Greece, per se. I look at it as representing my heritage and my family. I'm very proud to do that.'

He said, 'I never thought of it like that. I'm Polish, and I'd be very proud to represent my Polish heritage.'

I said, 'Exactly.' He saw where I was coming from and he understood, so that helped. There were a lot of little battles, though. There were the bigger battles too, but there were lots of little battles.

Anyway, I got signed up but all of the sudden my situation changed. It went from going out and sliding in the afternoon with some of my friends with no pressure, to camera crews, the press, international teams, all these big athletes and corporate sponsors.

The track at Lake Placid was completely transformed, the whole physical part of it. Then there was the whole mental game that was not the sport or the track; my comfort zone was completely gone. Before, I knew everybody; now I knew no one. I didn't have a turf, it got really hard, really fast and I felt like I had no support at all. My coach said he would help me but I feel like he was in it more for his personal gain than for mine.

I had a lot of conflicts with him. Plus, I wasn't feeling well that week. I had a horrible, horrible cold. I don't think he really prepared me very well for it, either.

We were able to get me registered for the race. By registering and competing for Greece I gave up all rights to ever compete for the U. S. in any sport internationally. Unless I said, 'Okay, I'm not going to represent Greece,' I'd have to wait six years before I could slide for the U. S. in any sport, which is okay because I don't think I'm going to be competing in any other sport. I was the first woman to ever represent Greece in an international luge competition, so I guess that was a good thing, but I was not known by any of the other athletes. I didn't know any of the other athletes either and out of nowhere I showed up and that was kind of tough because it was one of the last races of the season. All these other athletes knew everybody, and the coaches and everything; it was an extremely intimidating time. I had to start taking training runs and I started to get to know some people. I met Anne Abernathy of the Virgin Islands and talked with her for a little while, because she had actually slid for the U. S. for awhile then switched to the Virgin Islands. It was interesting to get her perspective on things."

When it came time for the actual race, it was two runs both in the same day. I was so sick that morning that when I got up, I would put on one sock, have to lie down, then put on the other sock, lie down again, and I just felt so crappy. I remember being at

the track, and I was outside warming up prior to the race, and Doris Neunen was there. She had just won the Olympic gold medal the year prior in the Albertville games. I was talking to her and she seemed very nice. I said, 'Well, congratulations on winning the Olympic gold.'

She said, 'Thank you.'

I said, 'So, Doris, how long have you been sliding?' I think she said twelve or thirteen years.

She said, 'How long have you been sliding?'

I said, 'Um, two months.'

She said, 'Oh, my!' It was at that time that I realized most of the people there had been sliding for as long as she had. Then here I came, and I actually did very well. I didn't come in last, because one of the German sliders crashed and I didn't have my best times but I had gotten into a new time bracket so I was pleased with my performance overall.

Allys: How many miles an hour were you going at that time?

Greta: Oh, I don't know. In Lake Placid, you probably get up to fifty, sixty. Maybe fifty, fifty-five miles an hour, or so.

Allys: Talk about your equipment. How did you get all of your equipment together so quickly?."

Greta: It was my coach, Tim, who got me the sled. I don't know if I paid for it or if I worked it off, but he had all these pieces in his workshop of all these different sleds, and he had some old sleds. He gave me this sled, which I found out later on was just a piece of crap. It didn't even last me a full season. I had that sled and then I bought a



helmet and a face shield from USLA. I didn't even have a rubber suit that first year. I used a cross-country ski suit.

Allys: For your competition?!

Greta: For my competition. I went out and bought a new one, and it was a wild suit! It had this fancy purple and green design, which looked like flames on it, or something. I don't know. It was not what I wanted but I needed to have something because all during my training I had just been wearing sweatpants and a sweatshirt. Or, I would just wear a turtleneck and then just put tights on. Of course that's not wind resistant, so I broke down and I went out and bought this suit. It was the end of the season so I didn't have much to choose from in my size. When I bought it, I thought, 'Oh, I don't look very professional' but it did the job, though. Then I had my little rubber booties, and I had just bought cross-country skiing gloves and then taped the spikes to them. Tim had gotten me some spikes from somewhere. I had probably the lousiest equipment of anybody on the circuit, and I had a very inattentive coach. I was feeling crappy, so I was just pleased that I finished the race whatsoever. It was my first taste of international competition and it gave me some good insight as to what was to come, but it was very lonely. It was one of the loneliest times of my life.

Allys: Are you going to the weight room now, as well, and training or just doing runs?

Greta: At that time, there was not much choice. I couldn't train in the U. S. Olympic Training Center because I couldn't get permission. There was a gym in town, but it was lousy, and it had horrible equipment. I really wasn't doing much physical training outside of going to the track once a day, even though I did a lot of walking and a

few sit-ups and push-ups, but for my physical training I wasn't doing nearly as much as I should have. I mostly spent time working on my sled, learning that, and going to the track. Josh Keller, Ken Keller's son, wanted to come out and train, so he came out and lived with me for three weeks. He always slid at different times than I did, so between the two of us, I spent a lot of time at track. I also ended up going back to the hospital another time or two.

Allys: Some more falls?

Greta: Yeah, I had a few concussions and whiplash, and I have quite a few scars on my hands and elbows. It was not an easy time.

Allys: No. But you were in Lake Placid all this time.

Greta: Yeah, in Lake Placid, so there was some comfort zone. I had some friends that I had made within the sport who were all older. They were in their thirties and forties, and they were all men. They weren't even trying to get on the U. S. team. They were just doing it out of the passion for the sport. We had good times. We'd go hiking when we weren't at the track, or, we hung out together and had a good time. They were very, very supportive of me and I'm still friends with them. They were excited for me and my success, and were behind me. Then, when I went on to Europe I met with a whole other issue. Anyway, I finished the first season, then I moved back to Oakdale.

Allys: And what month is this?

Greta: This is now in March that I moved back. I had a falling out with my coach, Tim, the night before I left, which didn't help any, but that was fine. I was hoping that he would help me do some more training; I could go back out there, or something. Because I didn't know anybody else, I didn't know anything else and no one else was really



willing to help me. What I ended up doing when I moved back to Minnesota was put wheels on my sled. My dad actually helped me. With plumbing pipes and with a huge piece of plywood, we built fake start handles so that I could practice my starts. I moved this down to my garage, which was a little bit on a hill. I actually practiced my starts on these, with this piece of plywood and these plumbing pipes. I'd go shooting out of my garage, and I'm sure my neighbors thought I was just crazy, and wondered, 'What the heck is she doing?' When I look back, it really didn't help me in my training whatsoever, but the thought was there.

Now my physical training grew in intensity, because things started to look more and more like a reality. I thought at the time, there was no limit to how many people could participate in the Olympics. All you had to do was be within ten percent of the fastest time, or something of that nature. In luge, it's timed to the thousandth of a second, and ten percent is a ton of time. That would be like four or five seconds, and I had easily finished within two seconds of the fastest time. Clearly I was able to do it, but the question was: would I be able to do it on other tracks? I'd only slid on the two and competed on the one.

Now I went back and started to make the greater commitment to training physically. I started going to grad school full-time, in the afternoon and the evenings, and then I would train. I would train anywhere from two to eight hours a day. On the heavy days, I would go to the gym and I would do the Stairmaster and rowing and free weights. I could easily be in the gym four or five hours doing that stuff. Then sometimes I would bike for a couple hours. I was doing all sorts of other physical activities;



whatever I could do, I would do it. There was not a day that went by that I didn't work out in some way or another.

Also, my first coach told me that seventy-five percent of the sport is mental ability, twenty-five percent is physical athletic ability. I think it's probably more ninety-five.

Allys: Yes, at that level, because everybody physically has the skills, so it is the mental edge that makes the difference.

Greta: Yeah. My greater concern was the whole relaxation thing. I needed to get relaxed on this. The more relaxed you are, the faster you go.

Allys: Did you have any formal training for relaxation?

Greta: Well, that's why I started to see a sport psychologist. I called around to a few places, and I finally found this one. His name was Eric LaMott, and he was actually working on his Ph.D. in kinesiology.

Allys: At the University of Minnesota?

Greta: At the University of Minnesota, and he had agreed to help me for, I think, fifteen dollars an hour, or something, because I had no money for this. I was working at a non-profit company, and going to grad school before this, so I had zero money to be doing any like this. He had agreed to help me, so we worked on different relaxation techniques and I don't think any of them worked. Some of them made me more stressed.

Allys: Didn't you do breathing?

Greta: We did breathing, and we tried 'go to a place that is relaxing.' We tried a lot of these mind things and then I listened to my heartbeat and it was supposed to go down, but as I heard it, that stressed me out more, and then it just went up instead.

Allys: Did you do muscle tension relaxation?

Greta: Yes, we did all these things and I just really didn't find any of them working. What I did find is that even though I was here, I was alone and I was doing all this alone because I would study and work out during the day, and so I never saw anybody. I would even go to the gym, and during the time at the gym at the gym that I went to, I could easily be there two to three hours in the weight room and not see a single soul. I'd spend all my days alone, and then I would go to classes in the evening, and I really didn't have any friends there. I found in all of my free time, I was studying or I was training. It was such a lonely time in my life.

Allys: Well what kept you going during this time?

Greta: I would see Eric maybe two times a week. I don't even remember what we talked about. I kept a journal, and we talked about training and a lot of issues and progress. When I would train, sometimes I'd think, 'Oh, gosh. I'm sick of this. I'm tired of this. I don't want to do any more.' I just kept thinking of opening ceremonies, though. I just kept thinking about the feeling of how it would be to walk into opening ceremonies, to be at the Olympics and what that sensation would be like. That's the only thing that kept me going, really. I just kept pushing and pushing. Then during the summer while I was doing all this, my brother, at least, continued to work. He would work out after work, and he had friends who would go and work out with him. When I had to work out, all my friends were working, and so I had to do it alone. I would have liked to have found a personal trainer, but I couldn't afford one.

Then we found out in the middle of the summer, July of that year, that they changed the qualification standards for the Olympics. I can remember my brother calling



me, and I stopped over so we could discuss it. They had changed the time qualification; previously it was that you got three official training runs prior to a race, and you had to finish two of the three and one of them had to be within ten percent of the fastest time. Now they also limited it to the top twenty-eight women in the world. At this point, I thought, 'Geez, what does that mean? I have no idea.'

The next day I called the United States Luge Association and asked, 'What's your take on this? How many people participated last time?' Someone said there were twenty-five women. I said, 'What do you think my odds are? What do you think the chances are?' He couldn't really tell me, and I had no idea. I just thought, and I remember saying to my brother at the time, 'I'd have more regret in not trying than if I tried. I'm going to go ahead. We'll see what happens.'

So that's what I did. I finished graduate school in August of that year, which seemed very anti-climactic, and I also got evicted. Well, I didn't get evicted at the same time, but the owner of the townhouse where I was living sold it. I was in the middle of trying to really beef up on my training, because I was going to leave for Europe in a couple months and I was going to go out to Lake Placid. I was finishing up graduate school, as well. Then I had to move, and I moved in with a friend, Megan, in Minneapolis. I was trying to move a minimal amount of stuff there because when I left for Europe I had to move everything up to my mom and dad's. It was a really hard time for moving, training and transition. Then in September of 1993 there was another slider who was about twenty years old, Spiro Pina. He slid on the U.S. junior team for a few years and then didn't make the team. He started to slide for Greece, so he and I were teammates. There was another man who was in Chicago who was also sliding for



Greece, and I had met him at one point. Spiro had spent the summer or the year in France studying. When he got back, he and I went out to Lake Placid for two weeks to train, and we stayed with Tim Nardiello. He said he would help coach us, but he really didn't. He was pretty much worthless.

Allys: Now you have to pay for these runs that you go down?

Greta: Yeah. Each time you took a run on a track, it was anywhere from ten to twenty dollars, and it didn't matter whether you crashed or not. It was very expensive, and you would take anywhere from two to six runs in a day.

Allys: Oh, so that's a hundred dollars.

Greta: Yeah. It could be.

Allys: That's a lot of money. You're not working, and you've graduated from college.

Greta: Yeah. In the first season I paid for everything. I basically used up all of my savings. As I was going into the second season, I actually had a little bit of a fund raising drive. I put together a little brochure, and if anyone was interested . . . people were giving me twenty-five dollars here, fifty dollars there, things of that nature. I think I raised about twenty five hundred dollars that way. My mom and dad started to come around as I was about to leave for Europe that second season, because now it looked more like a reality, but it was still so far off. We had no idea if it would happen or not; but there I was, going off to Europe, going on the World Cup circuit. People started to find out about it. People were interested; they were excited. As they were getting interested and excited they were getting my parents interested and excited, so they started to tell more people. Then my hometown newspaper did a story on me right before I left

for Europe. So of course, that was the talk of the town. My mom and dad actually, financially, started to support me, and my brother also helped me out. When it was all said and done, it cost me about twenty, twenty-five thousand dollars, or so, overall. And I had nothing.

Allys: Just a fabulous experience.

Greta: It was a wonderful experience, and it was worth it even at four times the price. I had very supportive friends and family, and I could stay with them when I was in town. The other thing is, I did get a little bit of funding from the International Luge Federation. They paid for all my coaching, and we did get a small subsidy from them to pay for some of the expenses and stuff, so that helped. Greece really didn't help at all. They promised all this money, especially if I qualified. They said that they would reimburse me for everything. I think I got six hundred dollars, and they did pay for my expenses at the Olympics. We were supposed to get funding from the International Committee and from resources that were supposed to go directly to the athletes. They kept that money, too. Money's a touchy subject with me.

Allys: Well, now you're getting ready to go.

Greta: Now we're getting ready. Spiro and I headed out to Lake Placid to train, because in Lake Placid there's an indoor start track. We went out there specifically just to work on our starts and to get our sleds in shape, I don't know if it was really helpful or not.

Allys: Did you get a different sled now?

Greta: No, I still had the same sled. I had no idea if it was any good or not; I had no idea what I was doing. We came back, and within a couple weeks I headed off to

Norway. This was in October, and I was off to Lillehammer, Norway. I found out just days before I was supposed to leave that the training camp that I was going to was cancelled. I was heading over to Lillehammer and had no idea where I was going or doing. My coach is this Gunther Lemmener from Austria, and I found out from him it was cancelled. But he said 'Anne Abernathy of the Virgin Islands will be there. Go and look up Anne.'

I packed up and I headed off to Lillehammer. It was kind of unsettling. I got to this place, and I got dropped off at some resort thing out in the middle of nowhere. I had no idea where I was. They told me where Anne was staying; she was in this little cabin. I dumped off my luggage, and I went to the lodge. I left a note and I waited for her to come. She came to the lodge to get me, and I got a very cold reception, to say the least. I think she was very annoyed that I was there, and that I just showed up. I said, 'Look, if I can't stay with you, even though there's enough room for two people to stay, I'll go somewhere else.'

She said, 'No, you can't get anywhere.'

She wasn't happy to see me. She was forty years old at that point, and had been in the sport already ten years. She had seen a lot of people who were just in and out of the sport, and I think she really wanted me to prove myself. She wasn't going to give me any slack whatsoever.

The next day we went to the track, and she introduced me to the Japanese coach; there were only a few countries there at this point. The Japanese sliders were starting real low, and the coach said he would help a little bit. Still, they weren't very helpful; and I just had no idea what I was doing. I didn't know what kind of sled work to do. I started



doing sled work with Anne one night and she couldn't believe I was doing some of the stuff I was doing. I told her, 'Well, that's what Tim told me.' And I found out then how bad of a coach he was and how misinformed I was. The sled that he sold me broke within a few weeks, and I had to buy another, a used one from the Austrian team.

At that point, I just was discouraged because I was so alone. There was nobody there supporting or helping me. There was a little bit here and there, but I didn't even know people. I didn't know whom to ask. I didn't know who would help me. I probably quit seventy five times that first week when I was over there. Finally, Spiro showed up, and that helped. Eventually, the rest of the team and the coach showed up, along with the other athletes. Then there was some sort of program and a training schedule. There was someone there, in theory, to help.

Allys: Now, did you talk to your brother at all during this time? Or where was he?

Greta: He was back at home. He and I had completely separate schedules. We never saw each other. We never talked to each other the whole season, except when we were both home for Christmas. We would both be in Europe at the same time, and we would miss each other by a day or two at different tracks. There'd be remnants of us, though. One time I was in Winterberg, and I just finished a training run, and I was in the warming house. I looked on the table, and there was a start list from a bobsled race that had just taken place that weekend, and there was my brother's name and number on it. I had just missed him there, and he had been up to Lillehammer for some training.

You see when I went to these tracks, I would talk to everybody, the track workers; I would just talk to everybody. A lot of the famous sliders, they wouldn't talk to anyone. They were too good for that but I just thought, 'Aw, heck! I'll talk to everybody.'

My brother had just finished a training run in Lillehammer, and when he got to the finish, one of the track workers walked up and said 'Which one of you is Greta's brother?' And Greg would said, 'Everywhere I went everyone knew who you were.'

But in general, my brother and I didn't really talk. I called home once a week, and my mom would always give me the status of what was going on with my brother. He would be either in Canada or Europe, so that's how I found out what was going on with him.

This is October 1993. We stayed in Lillehammer a couple weeks and trained. The first week I was mostly on my own. Then the second week I was with this FIL team, and with all these other members. There was the one coach, and then there was one man from Ireland. There was a younger girl and a guy from New Zealand. There were three of us representing Greece. After we left Lillehammer, we went over to Sigulda, Latvia. We stopped to pick up three from Estonia, and then we were in Sigulda and we trained for a week. From Sigulda we went to Igls, Austria and we trained there for another week. On the way to Igls, we stopped and we picked up two sliders from Bosnia and a coach from Bosnia. Then went to Igls, Austria. At Igls, we picked up another coach, who was sponsored by the FIL. Now we had Gunther, we had the other coach, and then now we had all these athletes. After we finished at Igls, Austria, then we went to Altenberg, Germany for a week. Then from Altenberg, Germany, I believe we went back to Sigulda, Latvia, because that was where the first World Cup race was and we wanted to get in as



much training there as possible. There was a race in Lillehammer but we decided to skip that and go straight over to do more training in Latvia.

The thing about the team that I was on was that all of these athletes were representing different countries. We had to support one another, because we were roommates and did sled work together. On the other hand, we were all the poorest sliders on the circuit. We were trying to beat each other out for the last few slots. It became very difficult. Anne and I actually ended up getting along very well. We became roomies, but not a lot of people got along with her. In some ways, it probably hurt me a little bit because I did get along so well with her, but she was helping me. I did get along with most people.

There started to be some competition, even though we were teammates. At first I was clearly the worst slider on the FIL team and on the whole circuit, because I was by far the least experienced slider. I was not a threat to anybody. Then, after awhile, I started to get better. All of the sudden, every once in awhile I was beating some of these other sliders. Then I was consistently beating these other sliders, which made for some very bitter feelings, particularly with the one slider from New Zealand. I was a threat at this point. It got to be very difficult to have all of these people who have such different personalities and different cultures together; not everyone spoke English. Everyone had different degrees of ability, financial support, pressure, and qualification status because some countries had their own qualification standards in addition to the Olympic qualification standards. There were all these different aspects brought into it, and yet you needed to keep focused on sliding and your performance.



We had to be not only the athletes but we really had to be our own coach. Our coach was absolutely useless to the females, and would not do any coaching outside of the track. We had to do all of our own sled work.

Allys: Talk about sled work.

Greta: It was most important to work on your steels. The steels are the runners and you had to consistently work on those to keep those at a top performance. Sometimes what you would do is take sandpaper, starting at a sixty grit and really scruff it up. Then you keep working it, and keep working it, going from a sixty grit to a hundred to a two hundred all the way up to maybe a two thousand grit, if you could find it. The goal was for your steels to be like mirrors, where you could literally look at yourself. Depending on each of the tracks, and how hard the ice was or how soft it was, was how soft or sharp or dull your steels had to be. Your steels also would get scratched, and they would get nicked on, so you had to constantly work on them to keep those in good shape. In crashing and moving them around, these sleds would get knocked around, so you had to do repairs on the sleds sometimes. Also, your bodyweight would change, so you'd have to change the weight in the sled accordingly.

Then you would have to work on your spikes, and sometimes you'd have to sharpen them or re-tape them on your fingers. Or, perhaps, there was repair that needed to be done on your helmet. You had to use duct tape; duct tape is a luger's best friend. You'd use duct tape on your sled. You'd use it on your rubber suit. You'd use it on your helmet. You'd use it on everything.

Allys: Now by this time you have a brand new rubber suit?

Greta: I did! I had a rubber suit, a blue and white rubber suit. However, I was still using my cross-country skiing suit to train with, until one day I was going down the hill in Altenberg, Germany. The suit had a zipper up the front, and I was just about to go into the final round, and all of the sudden the zipper popped. The whole thing just split right open. It kind of distracted me a little bit. I'm glad there weren't many more runs left. After that, I had to start using the rubber suit. Then I did, actually, end up getting two more rubber suits for the Olympics, but they were ugly. I had tried to save the rubber suit just for competition, because they got wrecked so easily.

Allys: Are they expensive?

Greta: They're very expensive. Rubber suits would run anywhere from two to five hundred dollars. I bought my sled used for about two or three hundred dollars, but new ones cost around twelve hundred dollars. Helmets are about fifty dollars. The booties are seventy-five dollars apiece, so it's not a cheap sport.

Allys: No. Well, what about the food and the travel arrangements, and the sleeping arrangements?

Greta: We usually went as cheap as we could go because no one could afford very much. We always shared rooms. I think the whole time that I was traveling, I actually got a room to myself once, for a week. It ended up that week I was sicker than a dog, so it was a good thing I had it alone. Most of the time I shared with Anne Abernathy but sometimes I would share it with one of the other sliders; sometimes there would be four of us in a room. Usually we tried to stay at hotels that served food, so we could eat all of our meals there. We never had the greatest of conditions, and in Sigulda, Latvia, the hotel that we stayed in was heated by hot water. One time they were out of hot water, so



that meant we got no heat, no hot showers. When we would go into the dining room it was, literally, so cold we could see our breath, so we would wear our winter coats when we went to eat.

Also, we couldn't tell what the food was. Sometimes we would take guesses as to whether it was pork or chicken. We would seriously look out the window to see if the neighbor's dog was there. This stuff was cooked in grease and nothing was healthy. When we were in Altenberg, Germany, the first night we were there we had pasta with some sort of red sauce, and we said it was good. But at this youth hostel where we were staying at, they made this same thing every single night we were there. We were trying to say, 'Can you put a white sauce on it? Can you make something else?' But they made the same thing. At these places they don't care if the food is healthy or not, so we weren't getting a lot of vegetables and no fruit. We'd look at some of these other teams, the Italian team and the Japanese team and others, and their coaches were purposely going into town and buying fresh fruits and vegetables. They would even do some cooking if they had to, to ensure that their athletes were getting well-balanced food, but our coach wasn't doing any of that.

We had been up in this youth hostel, which was a former army barracks in former East Germany, out in the middle of nowhere. There was absolutely nothing to do and there were about two stations on the television. We were close to the border to the Czech Republic. The one day that we had off and the track was closed I said, 'Can we go to Prague?' Our coach said 'No,' but what he ended up doing was, crossing the border just so they could buy beer. The beer was cheaper in the Czech Republic. That's what they



did on our day off: cross the border so that he could go buy more beer. That's how much of a priority the athletes were. He was absolutely, absolutely worthless.

Allys: What was your recourse with him? Nothing? You couldn't get a different coach? Had he been the coach before?

Greta: He used to be an athlete himself, and was quite good. He had been coaching for so long that it seemed as though he just lost interest in it; it was a job, and he could get away with a lot. They brought in this other coach, too, to help, but he made things even worse. If you didn't have a penis, they just simply were not interested because they felt that women were useless as athletes. They were more interested in, and they hung out with, the Austrian team because they were Austrian; they knew the Austrians.

Sometimes I would find a coach, like the Norwegian coach or a few other coaches, who would every once in a while make a comment to me like, 'keep your head down on this curve,' or, 'You're doing really well,' because they knew that we were struggling. They knew what kind of a coach he was--the fact that he wasn't one. He made it really hard, because I didn't know what I was doing; I was so inexperienced and still, there was all this pressure. There with a couple months of experience I was on the World Cup circuit, and I was competing with the top athletes in this sport. He was just doing absolutely nothing to support this.

Allys: Did you ever feel really scared, or tentative? You can't be tentative in this sport.

Greta: I was scared of the sport. I was scared shitless every time I went down the hill because I had to progress so fast. When you are younger and you go to these tracks,

they start you about halfway down the track. Then you slowly get to go up. When I'd go to these tracks, I'd have to start out at the top and go down. You walk the track, meaning that you and the coach and the other athletes actually walk all the way down along side the track. The coach tells you how to drive the whole track, so you do all of those mind runs. It's different, though, when you get on a sled and all of the sudden you're going sixty miles an hour down the track, and you twitch a muscle the wrong way and you could flip and hit a wall and you're out. The fact that I had to just go right to the top, and go fast right from the beginning, scared me. I never got relaxed, so I was scared every single time I went down it. On one hand, it was good because it kept me alert and it kept me sharp. There were maybe one or two times where I wasn't nervous and I wasn't as sharp, but then I didn't have good runs.

Allys: Because you really have to prepare for the turns.

Greta: You have to know what you're going to do before you get there, and you have to react.

Allys: You can't just let gravity speed you down, because you'll flip out.

Greta: It'll shoot you out of the track. I actually met a man who was shot out of the track, actually twice. That is how people have died in the sport. There's a lot of danger. In fact, when we were first training in Igls, Austria, Keith, this other Greek slider, broke his leg in the track and was out for the season.

Allys: He broke his leg because he flipped off his sled?

Greta: Yeah. I'm not exactly sure how he did it; if he came up and hit a wall, or what, but he did a really nasty job. I think part of it was he was really a cocky slider, too. He was not a good slider at all, and he was doing stuff that he shouldn't have been doing.

That was the scary part: I really got pushed into things I was not comfortable doing at all. A couple of times I had to go right from the start; I had to push off from the handles, and go as fast as I could go right from the very beginning. There is nothing worse than having to do that the first time you're at a track.

Allys: Why did you have to do that?

Greta: Well, what we ended up doing was . . . well, I will back up and tell you a little bit more about the season. We were in Altenberg, Germany; we were training there. Then we started on the World Cup circuit. We went to Sigulda, Latvia; the first two World Cups were held there. There were four World Cups in December of ninety-three, and it was how you performed in these four World Cups that determined you're placing, which determined who goes to the Olympics. You had to do well in these four. Pressure was on everybody and the first race that I had was not good. I thought 'There's no way I'm going to stand a chance qualifying.' In the second race, which I think was the second day, or two days later, I did really well. I was pleased with my performance, and I thought 'You know what? Now I stand a real chance.' We had to go from Sigulda, Latvia all the way down to Igls, Austria, and we had to drive all night. There were fourteen of us in two vans; fourteen people in these two vans, and all of our sleds and all of our equipment. There'd be a seat that was, maybe, three feet wide, and two of us would have to sit on that non-stop for thirty-six hours until we got to Igls. We were going through Lithuania and the Czech Republic. The road conditions were horrible, so none of us were getting any sleep whatsoever, plus we had to bribe the guards to get through the borders. We didn't always have food and we would just stop wherever we could to do whatever we needed to do. We would tell our coach we have to go to the



bathroom and he'd say 'wait.' He wouldn't stop until he had to go. Then finally we got to Igls, we were so exhausted. Meanwhile, all the athletes on all the top teams would fly. The coaches would bring gear, and they would have big trucks to haul everything. These other teams had several coaches, a team manager, trainers, and people who did their sled work for them.

We had trained in Igls previously; I had done very well on that track. I liked that track a lot. It was an easier track; it was a good track for me. When we got to Igls this time, I was excited to be there. However, the first day we were there I started not feeling well, started to get the chills and stuff. I ended up getting very sick. I had the chills, like the flu. I was vomiting and diarrhea. I couldn't eat or drink.

Allys: Did you think it was food poisoning, or the flu?

Greta: I don't know what it was, but I haven't been that sick in a long time. I was up all night vomiting and couldn't eat anything. I had such horrible headaches. Well, here I had to compete in this race in Igls. If I didn't compete, I would have blown my chances to be in the Olympics. You have to finish two official training runs and they usually give you a non-official training run a couple days before. Well, I was so sick I missed all the non-official runs. Then they started the first official run, where you get to start lower than the start handles, so you can go slower on the track if it's your first run. Then the second run you go right from the handles. Well, I had missed those, as well, because I was too sick. The race was on Saturday, so there were two more official training runs on Thursday, and one on Friday. I had to take the one on Thursday in order to compete and the night before I had been awake, throwing up all night, but I had to go. The whole time I was sick all week I wasn't going down to meals, and my coach never

once came up to see how I was doing. Anne Abernathy had said, 'Why don't you go up and see her?' But he never came up once. Then Spiro came up once just to see how I was doing, but that was it.

It was horrible! I mean, you feel so miserable. There was one man, Loma, who was one of the Bosnian sliders, he and I had become good friends. He used to come and see me quite often. Anne and the other female from Estonia would come and see me, because we kind of shared this room. Nobody really cared about me. Some of the other teams, like the Germans and the Americans, they had their own doctor with them. I didn't have a doctor; I didn't have anything like that. The next day I went to train, and I hadn't eaten for so long.

Allys: Did you have to put more weight on your sled?

Greta: No, my sled was maxed out, and I was at a weight where I couldn't put any extra weight on me, so it didn't make any difference. I lost weight, I don't know how much, and actually, when I was going out to slide that morning, my coach did say, 'Can you do this?'

I said, 'I don't have a choice. I have to do this.' I went for the first run down, and I think because of the pressure and because I hadn't eaten, I was so sick that I blacked out in the finish curve. I felt the whole way down like I was going so slowly, like the whole thing was in slow motion. I crossed the finish line, and there was a really sharp curve and a really steep up-ramp, and you have to start braking right away because it's such a short ascent. I thought I didn't have enough speed to even make it up this hill, so I didn't even begin to brake. Well, I must have been going fifty miles an hour, and they have this

padding at the very end, and I totally and completely wiped out. I just crashed at the end. And people were asking, 'Why didn't you slow down?'

I said, 'I blacked out. I didn't think I had enough speed to get up the hill.' I almost got injured just on the exit. I had to take the second run that same day, though. Then I had to come back and take another run. I actually raced, and it wasn't as good of a race as I felt I could have had compared to what I had done in the past, but I finished it.

Then from that point, we moved up to Winterberg, Germany. In this case, the first time I had ever been on this track was a couple days before the race. I started out right from the handles and went right from the very top. It was scary because everybody needed this race to qualify for the Olympics. There was a lot of pressure.

This was the last World Cup before Christmas. This was the last one to qualify for the Olympics. If my memory serves me correctly, I crashed on the very first run going down that track. Then I started to do better. I had just taken my last official training run, and then the race was going to be the next day. It is after you take your last training run that you have to strip down to your underwear and weigh in. I had just weighed-in in the finish house, and I was just coming out of the weigh room, and they were helping one of the U.S. sledders, Bethany Calcaterra, walk in. She was crying, and she was just sobbing, and so upset. It was Anne Abernathy, another slider and myself who were there, and we were asking, 'Bethany, what's wrong? Are you hurt? Are you okay?' She was crying so much she couldn't even talk, and she was trying to get her suit off.

We asked, 'Do you need ice? What's wrong? What happened?'



She couldn't even talk, and we were trying to help her. Finally she said, 'I hit someone in the track. I don't know who, but I saw something fly over my face. Get my suit off.' Then we could see that there was flesh and meat and blood on her suit from hitting this person. What she did was hit the German coach, and severed his leg just below the knee, so what she saw flying over her head was the lower portion of his leg. We helped her get the suit off, and of course they stopped the race. They airlifted him to the hospital, and they tried to reattach the leg and they couldn't. It was a very upsetting time; everybody was upset. Here we were going into this big race. This coach had been so well respected in the sport. This was his last season, and he was going to retire.

Allys: What was his name?

Greta: I can't recall. You just don't want to see any accidents, but this completely put off training and kind of screwed up the whole schedule.

Allys: How did it actually happen? Why was he still in the track?

Greta: In between sliders, coaches and managers and track workers will get into the actual track, and they will work on the track. They'll shave the ice, and they'll try to just get it ready for a big race. And he was down in between the final curve and the second-to-final curve, and he was shaving the ice and working on it. Well, what happens is a lot of times they'll wear spikes or cleats on their boots so that they can actually walk on the ice. As soon as there is a slider in the track they always announce 'Slider in the track' or 'Sled in the track' or something, so everyone knows to get out of the track. Well he had heard this, and he was getting out of the track. As he was getting out, his foot slipped and his cleat got caught in the ice, and he couldn't get it out. Bethany was coming down, and at this point she was going the fastest she can go, at sixty, sixty-five

miles an hour. In this sport, you don't look very much. The good ones don't look, at least; I do. She actually had seen him, but thought 'It's a track worker, he'll get out of the way,' and she put her head back. What she ended up doing was hitting his leg right in the middle of her sled, in between the two cufins, or the two runners, so it cracked her sled there. She was so lucky that she didn't get hurt because he was carrying some tool. She just got a little bruised, and her sled got cracked, but she wasn't hurt at all. She came up the next day and she slid. She did so well in her sliding that she automatically qualified for the Olympics. She did really well. She did go to the Olympics, and she was only about sixteen or fourteen, something like that; a teenager.

Many of the athletes got down, because they knew the coach, and they were so upset. It was really hard to block that out. I didn't really sit and think about it that much. I didn't want to. A lot of people were talking about this and that but I just wanted to be left alone. I thought, 'I've got my race to think about.' I know that's very selfish, but there was nothing I could do to help him.

Allys: Yeah, right. Well, I think it's a matter of focus.

Greta: That's exactly what it is. Fortunately, I went out and I had a very good race. Because of my race, I did qualify.

Allys: Now is that the race that did qualify you that day?

Greta: Yes.

Allys: So then you were in the top twenty-six of the sliders of the world.

Greta: You had to be in the top twenty-eight and I never found out my official ranking, but I think I finished twenty-third or twenty-fourth overall. I thought that was pretty good.



Allys: Excellent. So now this is the end of the World Cup.

Greta: Nope, it's not the end. This is just the end of the qualifying. After that, Anne Abernathy and I went back up to Lillehammer and we trained for a week before we went home for Christmas. We went home for Christmas for two weeks, then I came back after that.

Allys: Now when you were at Lillehammer training for a week, you were just on your own, and just doing runs.

Greta: Yes, Anne and I were just on our own. I believe the Americans were there, also, doing some training, because this was the last that anybody could train on the Lillehammer track until the official training started for the Olympics.

Allys: So it stopped at Christmas.

Greta: It stopped at Christmas, or the first of the year, or whatever. We were out there, the Americans were up there, the Austrians were up there, and there was a few others that were up there trying to get the last of their training in while they still could. In fact, Anne and I took the train up and we brought all of our equipment, but we sent our sleds up with the Americans, because they had the truck. They brought our sleds up for us, which was nice.

Allys: I wonder what they would do to those on airplanes? Just check it.

Greta: Yeah, what we did do is we wrapped them in a sleeping bag, and then I put plastic all around and a lot of duct tape. What I would do was actually pack clothes and stuff inside of it. Unfortunately, when it came back from the Olympics, I sent it back with my mom and dad. The airport officials, for whatever reason, were asking what was in it. My mom and dad didn't know, so they had to go in and they had to open it all up.



My weights were in there, and they couldn't tell what this thing was. It was just a big, old flat piece of weight. I felt bad for them for that.

I went home for Christmas for a few weeks, and then went back to Altenberg, Germany. We trained there for, I believe, two or three weeks. We had another World Cup race there, and that was the last World Cup race of the season. Then from there, I went down to Greece. I should say, backing up, after Christmas, I spent one day in Chicago and I became a Greek citizen there, in January of 1994, approximately six weeks before the Olympics.

This was cutting it very close. My brother became a Greek citizen in Geneva, Switzerland. After we were in Altenberg, Germany, I went down to Greece and we were in Greece for a week; I got my Greek passport one week before opening ceremonies. That was cutting it close. At that point, the Greek Olympic Committee was actually going to wherever they needed to go, on a daily basis, pushing this through, and because what had happened over the course of the summer prior to the Olympics in 1993, we had been doing everything we could do. We were trying to speed things up. My brother and I had even driven down to Chicago one day to go and meet with the Greek consulate, and just try to say, 'We're serious about this,' just to get this pushed through; just to make a physical presence because things were so slow.

Well, during the summer what happened was they changed the process on how to become a Greek citizen, but they didn't tell the Greek consulate, though, so my friend Olga, in Greece, was calling and going to the Ministry in Greece. I got this letter from her one day that said there were all these rule changes. We called the consulate, and they didn't know anything about it. At one point we had a conference call between my

brother in his office in downtown Minneapolis, I was in my townhouse in Oakdale, the consulate in Chicago and Olga in Greece. Olga was telling the consulate what they needed to do to get us our citizenship, because Greece failed to inform the consulate what we needed to do. Then the consulate asked her to send us the stuff, and then we sent it down to them. At that point we were trying to overnight everything.

Then the challenge was they were asking for documentation that didn't exist. They wanted proof that our grandparents were not divorced. Well, we don't have any documentation like that, so we had to come up with something. Then we needed to get something that needed to be notarized by a Greek notary. We didn't know if that meant someone who's Greek but an American notary, or what. Somehow we found someone who had a Greek name, who was a notary, and then we had to have some other Greek witness. We were trying to turn these things around within a day or two, and it was amazing. It was just a ton of red tape

Allys: Now you can actually be a dual citizen of Greece.

Greta: Under U.S. law, I am an American citizen, and I'm a Greek national. In Greece's eyes, I have dual citizenship. The other thing that we ran into was that in Greece they have mandatory military enrollment for men. We had to be very careful that my brother wasn't going to get snagged into that, so he wouldn't be forced into the military. We had to be careful; all of the sudden, there were all of these things popping up that we had no idea about.

Allys: But it all came in just in time.

Greta: It came just in time. There was not a lot of slack.



Allys: No. There were so many times when the whole program could have turned sour.

Greta: At the beginning when we said we were going to go until we can't go any further, or it costs us a hundred dollars, that was gone in no time. Looking back, a reporter was asking me at the Olympics what I thought of it. I said, 'If I look back now, our odds of making it were a million to one.' That's what I would have said, because there were so many hurdles and other snags along the way that we never even anticipated. Somehow we always managed to go over, under, or around whatever it was. We just kept persevering and we had no idea there were things that we came across that would be a problem.

Allys: Probably by having the big goal in mind, and then taking each day as it came, you were able to keep moving forward. If you had know at the very beginning that all of this was going to be a problem.

Greta: I probably wouldn't have done it. I don't know that Greg would have. Honestly, I don't know that either one of would have persevered if the other one wasn't persevering. Even though we weren't with each other, we knew the other one was out there trying. The way he qualified was different than mine, and he actually got qualified by Thanksgiving of 1993, and I wouldn't know until Christmas. My mom didn't want to tell me because she thought that I would have more pressure. I felt so much pressure taken off of me because one of us did qualify. I was so happy he got qualified, and I thought that was terrific. It's terrific to go, but to be able to experience this with your sibling was even better. We became so close as a result of it, and I don't know if we would have done it if the other wasn't there pushing, and having the same goal, and



working just as hard. He and I never even saw each other slide until we got to the Olympics. That was the first time. I didn't even see him bobsled until the actual Olympics, in the race. He didn't see me slide until he was out of the track watching me taking my training runs, and so he helped me out there. That was the first time we actually got to see each other in action, which was just wild. We never got together until we went to Greece. We went to Greece for a week before opening ceremonies.

Allys: Now when you were in Greece for the week, were you with your relatives, or were you in Athens?

Greta: We were in Athens because the Greek Olympic Committee wanted us there a week beforehand. We thought, 'This is stupid. We should be training somewhere.' They didn't even get training facilities for us. They put us up at a hotel but we had nowhere to work out, nowhere to train. There it was, two weeks before the Olympics, and they only found a gym for us to work out, I think, one day while we were there. There we were trying to go for the Olympics, and they were not doing anything to help us.

Allys: Do you think it was because they didn't know any better?

Greta: Well, they're the Olympic Committee. You would think that they would know better. The other athletes that were there, they were all from Greece, so they were able to be up in their home, where they would train, typically in northern Greece. They had their facilities, and they had their ways of training, but we came and there was nothing for us.

Allys: So what did you do all week?

Greta: We did some touristy things. Actually, my brother had never been there before. His brakeman was from Athens, so he took us around. We went to the Acropolis, and we did some shopping, because what else was there to do? Then we did have to do some official business. We had to go to the Olympic Office, and we had to get a suitcase and our uniforms.

Allys: Oh, sure. Because you had—" (Tape cuts off; end of side A)

Greta: We didn't need to have a medical examination to go to the Olympics. We had to have one in order to compete in the sport prior to the season. Once we got to the Olympics, I had to be tested, as a female, to prove that I was a female. They scraped my mouth and checked my chromosomes to make sure I was a woman because they'd had cheating in the past. Then I actually got this little card that attached to my I.D. that proved that I was a woman. I had to have that before I could compete in my sport.

Allys: Yeah. They just took that out this year, that gender verification

Greta: I said, 'Well, if anyone ever questions that I'm a woman, I've got proof.'

Allys: So, you were still in Greece. What did you do there?

Greta: Well, no, in Greece we had to do some press stuff and there was a banquet. It was all in Greek, though, and I didn't really speak any Greek. I didn't know what was going on. We were feeling pressure and they were starting to put more pressure on us. The president actually took a liking to me for some reason and was very supportive. He came up to me the night before we were leaving and said 'We have very high hopes for you. We want a top whatever finish and blah, blah, blah.'

I thought, 'Well thanks for that pressure. I really appreciate that.' At the Olympics, there were twenty-five women competing in the sport, and all week long I had

been finishing between fifteenth and twentieth place, and my goal was just to finish in the top twenty, and I had been doing pretty well. The night before the race, some of the Greek officials came up to me and said 'We'd like a top twelve finish from you.'

I said, 'A top twelve?'

They said, 'Yeah. If you get a top twelve finish, it'll do this, this, and this for us.' Nothing to do with me, but everything for them.

I said, 'Look. The only time I've had a top twelve finish is when there were twelve people in the race. Don't put this extra pressure on me.' The Olympics is about everybody except the athletes. It's all about the sponsors, the Olympic committees, the federations, and everybody else.

It's one thing what you seen on television, it's a whole other thing in reality, behind the scenes and everything else. Unfortunately, there were a lot of very rude awakenings.

Allys: Well, let's go back to Greece and then on your way to Lillehammer, and then get into the opening ceremonies, and take the Olympic experience from that perspective."

Greta: "Well, so we finished Greece. When we were in Greece, that was when we really started to come into, and we fully expected to, a little bit of resistance to the fact that we were Americans representing Greece. We didn't get it too much in Greece, but even with the other athletes on the team, the fact that I didn't speak any Greek was not easy. I never had the opportunity to learn Greek and I grew up in a small town. There were no Greek people there. It wasn't offered at St. Kate's and there was no place for me to learn it. I tried to take a little tutoring, but I couldn't afford that, so I tried to learn a



little bit on my own, but . . . So people didn't really understand that. Then I tried to tell the story about my grandparents and that seemed to help a little bit.

We left Greece, and we went up to Lillehammer--

Allys: You flew into Oslo, then?

Greta: Oslo, then took a bus up, and then that first night we arrived we went into get our credentials, our I.D.s. I can remember when we got off the bus and we were walking into the building, it was just then that it really hit me that this was going to happen. Even up until the last minute, we thought for sure something was going to happen, that it wasn't going come through. Our passports weren't going to come through, or something was going to happen so that we couldn't compete. All of the sudden we were walking in to get our credentials and I just started pounding on my brother's arm. I said, 'Oh my God! We're at the Olympics!' All of the sudden it was a reality. We were at the Olympics and we were going be in the Olympics. It was cool.

I know that we tried to be, I don't want to say nonchalant, but we tried to take things in stride. In a way, we were just awestruck with a lot of stuff because this was all so new to us, this whole international model. I think, in a way, we probably had more fun, to some extent, because we weren't expected to come in and take the gold. We wanted to come and do our best, and we worked very hard to get there. We were just making the most of it and we were having a good time. The first day we were there, we were just running around the village to see what there was to see. We ran into athletes that we knew, and when we would see someone that we wouldn't know we were like, 'Oh my God, that's so-and-so from the skiing or skating.' It was kind of like: here's two kids

from Askov, what the hell are they doing at the Olympics? When we look back, it's like what were we doing there? We never thought it would happen.

Allys: Now before you got there, did Minnesota do anything before you went to Greece? Or did they wait till you got to Lillehammer?

Greta: In terms of what?

Allys: Interview you, and things of that nature.

Greta: We were kind of a secret. In Greece, they had done some; a few stories not, per se, on us but more 'this is the team going.' We tried to avoid interviews there as much as possible. Our hometown newspaper did a story on me before I left, and then I think they had done a story at some point. Then as we were getting closer to Christmas, they started to do weekly reports. Then we became front page news, basically, for about two or three months straight.

Allys: In Askov.

Greta: Yeah, in my hometown newspaper. We were always on the front page for one thing or another; when Greg qualified, when I qualified for the Olympics, it was always what we were doing. They had stuff when we were at the Olympics and prior to the Olympics. When my mom and dad got back, they did a story on their trip and then when I got back, they did another story. We were pretty big news in the small town. Actually, when we were home for Christmas, it sounds so funny to say, we did a press conference out at Askov's community center. The reason that we did it was there were some local newspapers that wanted to do the story, so they asked the *Askov American* paper, and then the *Sandstone* paper. There were also, I believe, two television stations from Duluth that had actually come down and did some stories on us. It's just pretty

funny. Before I left to go to Europe the first time in the fall of 1993, the *Star Tribune* had done a story on my brother and myself, and also Spiro Pina. Then when I was on the World Cup circuit, I had gotten a call from the *Pioneer Press*. When we got to the Olympics, the first day we ran into a bunch of press, just different newspapers from around the country and the world. They were just looking for stories, and so they did a story.

I believe CBS was airing the Olympics that year. Prior to my first official training run, I'd gotten an e-mail from Kevin Smith, the producer out at WCCO. He said they wanted to do a story, and they wanted to come out to the track, and asked when I was training.

I sent him an e-mail back, saying, 'You know, I would be happy to talk to you, but I will not talk to you before or during my training, only after my training.'

I was sitting out at the track for my first official training run during mind runs. All of the sudden, Grace Lee Nichol, who was a reporter for WCCO, walked in the warming house and sat down next to me and introduced herself.

I said, 'I know who you are.' I just got really mad, at first. I said, 'I got an e-mail from Kevin and I said I'd talk to you, but not before or during the training.' It was then that I really started to see how things were changing and how the press can be really invasive into your space and your training. I also saw what a distraction the press could be, because then I went outside and as soon as I walked out of the warming house there was a television camera right on me and it followed me as I was walking down to the track. It was so distracting, because he was saying things to me. I was so distracted that I forgot to put my neck strap on. I went down and I did what they call "losing your head"



in the sharp curves, or the bigger curves where there was so much gravitational pull, I couldn't lift my head up. My head was dragging on the ice because I forgot to put on the strap. That was kind of the first sign that the press was going to be a distraction. Later on that week, at one point I came out of the warming house and CBS was there, and WCCO and some other reporter. They were saying 'Greta, can we talk to you?' I know that isn't very many, but to this kid from Askov, who sat and talked to the *Askov American* reporter in the coffee shop, it was a whole different thing.

Normally when you train there's maybe a coach or a track worker, or maybe another athlete up in the start facility, but when it came time for the Olympic race, there must have been twenty people up there. You looked down, and there were probably six or eight television cameras on you along the track. You see all these people, and they all have these cowbells; there was all this noise and this distraction. It was just so completely different than the training conditions that it was a major, major distraction. The whole Olympics is just a major distraction to you. Your ability to focus is a key factor because even going down the track, you hear things. Out of the corner of your eye, you see darkness when normally it's just snow; all of the sudden, there were people and you saw movement. It was really hard.

Allys: Let's go back and talk about the opening ceremony, walking in on the parade. I mean, you came in on the first night found your place to stay in the village.

Greta: We were actually there a week before opening ceremonies.

Allys: You were doing your training runs at that time, or no?

Greta: Greg didn't start doing his till the second week. Spiro started doing his, I think, the first day of opening ceremonies. I started mine the day or next two days after

that because we could only start training about three or four days prior to the races. We also did some training. Once again, the facilities at the Olympics were not very good. There was only one weight room. I never even went to it; I just did stuff in my room and tried to do some stuff outside. There really wasn't much to do, so I really didn't feel like I was in the best shape at the Olympics.

We ran around, and went into Lillehamer a little bit. My mom and dad had come in, and so we went out to see them. We just tried to have a little bit of fun, before all the pressure and the madness started.

Opening ceremonies were neat because we all gathered in the cafeteria with all these countries and all these people. It was fun because you traded pins, and you looked for people that you knew. You didn't even know yet who's going to be there from some of the countries.

We started walking to it and it was quite a hike, actually, to the opening ceremonies. Because the Olympics started in Greece, Greece is always the first country to walk in. Because I was one of two female athletes on the team, I was in the front row, so it was pretty exciting and walking into opening ceremonies was just an overwhelming feeling. The adrenaline rush just takes over. My lip was just quivering, because you just walked in and there were forty thousand people, all eyes are on you. I felt like, 'Wow, this is an amazing feeling.'

I had gotten tickets for my mom and dad for opening ceremonies, but I didn't know where they were. I knew the tickets were expensive, so I hoped they were sitting somewhere good. There were forty thousand people and I was walking in there, and all of the sudden I heard 'Greta! Greta!' It was my mom. I looked over, and somehow she



talked the security person into letting her on the main floor. I was like, 'Well, hi, Mom.' Anyway, both my brother and I saw my mom. I didn't see my dad, but my brother saw him.

Allys: He was sitting some place else?

Greta: Yeah, just very close to her. It was fun. I mean, it was just really cool. And it was cold. Oh, was it cold. Then, 'let the games begin' because they started the next day. Spiro started training, and then I started training. All week long I had been training, and I was very happy with my training. I hadn't crashed in a long time, so I was a lot more confident as a slider. The last training run that I took before Christmas, I broke a forty-nine. I had never been in the forty-ninth. I'd been at fifty-point-zero-zero-one, or something, so I quit on a good note. I had been sliding well at the Lillehammer track, but I didn't like it. It has a straightaway, and I never did like it. It chewed me up and spit me out a bunch of times. All week I had been training really well. Then came the day, the last day of training, and I had two official runs. On the first one, I did really well. Then the second run, I crashed. I hadn't crashed in so long, that I just thought, 'Well, where'd that come from?' I remember I stopped sliding in the finish curve, and there was a photographer there, taking pictures of me. My brother came running up, and he just pushed the photographer out of the way to come and help me and get my sled. I got out and I was fine, but there's nothing worse because it's such a mind game to have this crash your last run going into the Olympics. I even tried calling my sports psychologist just to talk to him.

Allys: You couldn't reach him?



Greta: No, I wasn't able to get a hold of him. He said he was there, but just in another room, and I had just missed him. It was really hard, but I came out the next day and I was having a great run. I was sliding really well, and then I came out of curve twelve, I think, into the straightaway, and I hit a wall. I flipped over and the sled flipped over on top of me. I tried to get back on the sled because the ice was so exceptionally hard that day, and I had even fewer clothes on than I normally do, that it felt like a thousand needles prickling me. I almost made it on, but I fell off. I stopped sliding in the finish curve, and I knew that if I crossed the finish line still in contact with my sled I could continue to race. It was a total of four runs over two days.

I got up, picked up my sled; I was wearing these little rubber booties, trying to walk on ice. The track starts to go uphill before the finish line, so I was grabbing the side of the track trying to pull myself up while carrying the sled. Then off to the left-hand side I hear this 'Greta, I love you.' This was my mom. My mom's biggest fear was that I was going to get brain-dead. This is the first time she saw me slide, and I crashed right in front of her and my dad and my sister and her husband. Then my brother had come running down. There was a platform next to the finish line, and he crossed over a fence and he was standing on this platform. He was yelling at me, 'Just cross the line!'

I was thinking, 'What does it look like I'm trying to do?'

I think the audience was just wondering 'What the heck's going on?' Then they realized what I was doing, and they started to cheer me on a bit. I finally got across, and I got outside the track. I was standing there, and the whole point of Greg being there was to carry my sled and to help me, but he was off talking to a couple people. I was yelling 'Greg, come here!' I didn't realize it, but he had crossed over this fence and he wasn't

supposed to, so the two top race officials had yanked him out. They were yelling at him, and they were talking about disqualifying me because he wasn't supposed to go on this platform. Fortunately for me, as I said earlier, I talked to all the track workers and everything, and the top official was Bjorn, who was the track manager of the Lillehammer track. Right before Christmas, as I was finishing up, I had been talking to Bjorn.

I said, 'Hey did you meet the driver of the Greek bobsled team?'

Then he said 'Yeah.'

I said, 'Did you realize it was my brother?'

He goes, 'Oh, no.'

Back at the Olympics, the officials were talking to Greg. Finally, my brother said to him, 'Well, I'm her brother.'

Then he realized 'Oh, okay he's an athlete. He knows about this. Here's a pin.'

He gave Greg a pin, which is what everyone trades. Then Greg finally helped me out. The bummer of it all is after every race you always have to weigh your sled and you have to be weighed in to see if you're within the constraints; but they also randomly select a number of athletes that have to be tested on everything. You have to strip down to your skivvies again. They measure the length of your spikes. They weigh and measure everything on your sled. They take every measurement that they can possibly take. Wouldn't you know, after crashing, I get up there and they said 'You've been selected.'

I had to go in this room. I had to take off all my equipment and go through all this stuff, which is the biggest pain in the butt. Then I had to go back up. At this point, I

was twenty-fourth, because one of the U.S. sliders crashed, and she quit and got out of the track.

On the way up for the second run, one of the Greek officials said, 'Something's wrong with your sled. Your sled's broken.' He tried to explain, but I didn't understand.

I said, 'Well, tell the coach.' When I went out to do my second run that way, I said to the coach, 'Did you fix it?'

He said, 'Yeah, I did.'

I just trusted that he did, and I went down the second run. The exact same thing happened in the exact same spot, but this time I stayed on the sled. When I finished the second run, they said, 'Guess what? You've been selected again,' for all these tests. I had to strip down; I had to do everything completely again.

Before the races had ever started, I told my brother to just keep all the press away. I didn't want to talk the press until I was completely done with all runs. I thought, 'I couldn't have a worse day.' I had to have this happen twice. I'd never heard of anyone having it happen twice. My response was just, 'Oh, man!'

After that, I was standing outside with my brother and we were getting my sled ready. The Swedish coach came up to me and said, 'Greta, Swedish television would like to talk to you.'

I asked, 'Well, why?'

He said, 'Because of your crash.'

I asked, 'Do I have to speak Swedish? Because I don't speak it.'

He said, 'No, that's fine.'

We went over there, and Swedish television said, 'So you had a rough day today.'



I said, 'I had a painfully rough day today.'

They asked, 'Well, what happened?'

I said, 'I don't know. I know my sled is broken right now. I don't know if it happened before, during, or after. I don't know if it was my sled, or if it was my driving. The fact is, it happened.'

They asked, 'Do you expect to move up in the rankings?'

I said 'No. I hope I don't move up in the ranking, because that would require someone else to crash. It's too dangerous, and I don't want to see anyone else crashing.' Then they asked me some more questions. I just thought that was really funny they wanted to interview me.

I got back to the Olympic village, and some of the Greek officials who had heard about it came up and just hugged and kissed me, and said 'Bravo, bravo.'

I didn't really understand, and I said, 'I'm in last place. What are you talking about?'

Then I had to bring my sled down into the hardware store to get it fitted for screws. I was carrying my sled through downtown Lillehammer; it was just crowded with people. I got into the hardware store and they had televisions in there. They had all seen my crash, so they knew what had happened. Later that day, I was walking through the Olympic village and some of my Norwegian friends walked up to me, and they said, 'You know, you're all over Norwegian television and radio.'

I said, 'Well, yeah, because of the crash.'

They said, 'Yeah, but do you know what they're saying?'

I said, 'No.'

They said, 'Well, they're calling you a hero.'

I said, 'A hero? Why? I'm in last place.'

They said, 'Yeah, but you didn't quit, and they've never seen anything like that.'

My brother and I looked at each other, 'Oh, that's kind of cool!'

Like, I told Swedish television, 'I just want to fix my sled and come out tomorrow and show people what I can do.' The next day we got my sled fixed, and I went out and I had two new personal best times. I still got to show people what I could do, and so that's my little story.

Allys: Yeah! Then you had a lot of response from around the world, didn't you?

Greta: Yeah, I think I got more coverage than the gold medallist did. I had a friend in Chicago who got a phone call from a friend in Kansas who heard it on the radio. There were friends in Japan and England and Greece who had all heard the stories. Someone down in Virginia got something off the news and sent it to my mom. I actually got world wide coverage as a result of it.

Even the next day, my brother ran into one of those officials who was yelling at him, and he said, 'Oh, your sister's doing very well today.'

I was really glad when it was all over. I mean, it's too bad it happened, but I tried to make the best of the situation. I speak to a lot of school children, and it really makes for a good story to tell them that I didn't win a medal, but they were still calling me a hero. The message is a good one for kids.

Allys: It's a good one for everyone. It's actually one that fits your whole life, because you set a goal and you accomplished a goal. Then you set another. For example,

you couldn't not finish your master's degree. Once you've decided to do something, you pretty much do it.

Greta: Yeah, you pretty much do do it. There's gonna be challenges and struggles and obstacles, and things that you certainly don't anticipate, but you just have to deal with them. You keep going and move on, and readjust and plan a new course of action, and go from there.

Allys: What's the next adventure?

Greta: The next adventure is to go back to Ethiopia in the summer. I spent six and a half weeks in Ethiopia last summer, doing mission work. I work with children there at a school. I taught English and any number of things. Then I went on to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro in Tanzania for a week. Now I'm returning back to Ethiopia again this summer to work with the kids for another four and a half weeks.

Allys: How did you find out about this volunteer opportunity?

Greta: Every two years I get an itch to do something major and life-altering. From the Olympics, two years later I started my own business then last year I was at this itchy point. It had always been a dream of mine to work with children in Africa, so I felt it was a perfect time in my life. I started researching mission organizations and finally found one that would allow me to do it for a shorter period of time. It's through an organization called VIDES, and they found the placement for me. It was exactly what I wanted, and I absolutely love doing it. It's wonderful to work with these children.

Allys: Now, is this a Catholic organization?

Greta: VIDES is, yes, but you don't have to be Catholic to participate.

Allys: What are the ages of the children you work with?



Greta: Anywhere from three on up to twenty. We do all sorts of stuff.

Allys: Girls and boys?

Greta: Yeah, but I'm primarily working with girls. I only teach girls, and then a little bit with boys during the play time. I'll play with them and teach them games, and stuff, but I also teach typing and do a lot of business stuff for the sisters, as well, and try to do proposals. Now I'm in the process of actually starting a foundation to continue supporting them through collecting school and medical supplies, scholarships, and helping to get funds to build schools and buy food. That's the next big step, to get this foundation up and going.

Allys: Explain your up coming trip and your web site.

Greta: With this trip that I'm going on, I started a web site at [www.gscreative.com/africa.htm](http://www.gscreative.com/africa.htm), which is a mouthful. On it, I have all these different programs that I started. Also, I'm going to put a diary of my experiences, so people can follow along and actually find out what I'm doing and what the conditions are with the war and the famine that is happening right now in Ethiopia. I know that the children I worked with last summer, most of them are only receiving one meal a day. There are going to be very interesting and challenging conditions this year. It's going to be a tough summer.

Allys: What about you? Do you take food with you?

Greta: I actually am bringing money for food. A lot of my family, friends, colleagues, associates, people that I know, and churches have donated a lot of money. I hope we can get the food over there, to help supply it to the kids. I will also be bringing school supplies and medical supplies with me. I'm also bringing another volunteer with

me this summer, as well. I hope it's a program where I can continue to send volunteers even if I can't make it, and continue to work with the kids. Because so little here goes so far over there, I want to continue that.

Allys: Well, this has been quite an adventure. The Africa trip sounds like something very worthwhile, and rewarding, in a different way than the Olympics. The adventures in your life are certainly far-reaching, not only for you but for people that know you, as well. How did Askov recognize you when you came back from the Olympics?

Greta: Well being a small town, they threw us a welcome back party. They put the announcement in the *Askov American*, of course. There were probably over three hundred people who attended this, anybody and everybody that we knew, which was very nice. They had a potluck so there were sandwiches and things like that. The community recognized us by first presenting both my brother and myself each with a key to the city. Then there were individual recognitions; like a letter from a congressman. Basically, they gave us a welcome party, and then we kind of told our story a little bit to the people. It was very sweet.

The other funny thing is when we were over at the Olympics, they had put our Olympic address in the *Askov American*, our hometown newspaper. When we actually got to the Olympics, there was already a stack of mail waiting for us. All these Greek officials and all these people from Greece, none of them had any mail, but my brother and I each had this stack of mail waiting for us. There was one thing, an envelope we each got; it was this long sheet of paper, all these sheets of paper taped together, and there were probably about two hundred signatures on this sheet of paper. They just put

“best wishes” in the local café, and people could sign it. They mailed it to us, so we had this whole long sheet of all these signatures, and the Greeks could not believe this. They were just absolutely amazed with how much mail and support we got, so that was fun. That was where it was really fun to be able to share that experience with the town.

Allys: Absolutely. Well, this is a great story and a great adventure. Now you have another two years to think of something else to do in your life.

Greta: Yeah, I’m already thinking about it.

Allys: What about your business? We didn’t talk too much about that. It allows you to go to Africa.

Greta: Yes. Obviously, I like to travel, and one of the things that has always bothered me when I work is two weeks of vacation a year. That’s just not enough to see the world. I started a business about six years ago, just doing a little bit of freelance work here and there. I taught myself graphic design, with the goal that eventually I’d be able to have my own business, so I’d have more control over my time. Then I could do what I wanted to do, when I wanted to do it, and go where I wanted to go. It just started ballooning and I developed a business aptitude for graphic design, market expertise and creative writing. I bought a house in the fall of 1996, I believe, and within three months after that, the business had grown up so much that I quit my job. I actually quit it in part because I was selected to go on a professional exchange program through the Rotary International Foundation, to the Middle East for six weeks. My last job would not give me the time off to do it, so I basically quit my job to do it. I had gotten my business built up well enough, though, and now I figure that my salary is much better than it was. I



have a lot more freedom and flexibility, and I calculate that I get two to three months of vacation a year, verses the two weeks of vacation a year.

Allys: Tell me about that Rotary experience, in the Middle East. Were you the only woman in that group?

Greta: No, there was the team leader, who was a Rotarian, she was a woman; there was one other woman in the group, and then two other males. You have to be a working professional, and you had to be selected. You go over there, and you're just immersed into the culture. You stay with other Rotarians; this was in Jordan, and we would stay with Jordanian families. Then we got to go and see everything from religion to business to education to tourist sites to all the historical sights. We were there for four and a half weeks and they have things planned for you, so you learn so much about the culture, and get involved in everything while you're there. It was just a wonderful opportunity. Then we went over to Israel for another week on our own. It was a terrific opportunity.

Allys: What did you do to qualify? Or, how were you chosen? Did someone submit your name?

Greta: Well, actually, my doctor, who's one of my best friends' dad, is a Rotarian. I'll tell you a little funny story. They have one or two trips to different countries every year, and he called me the summer before the Olympics. He was telling me about this group study exchange, and they happened to have a trip going to Greece the following year. He said 'You're a perfect candidate for it.'

I sent in my application. They were going to have to interview me early, because I was leaving to go to Europe. Then I got a phone call that said, 'I'm sorry, we can't

interview you and select you for the team,' because I would have missed the first team meeting. The reason I missed it was because I was representing Greece in the Olympics. That's why I couldn't be on the team to Greece.

Anyone who is a professional, and now under the age of forty, can qualify. You just simply find out about the program and you have to fill out an application, and you have to go through an interviewing process. Then you're selected based upon that. All expenses are paid, so for once I didn't have to pay for my trip.

Allys: We need to finish on the torch you carried.

Greta: That's right. When the Olympics were in Atlanta--

Allys: In 1996, the centennial Olympics.

Greta: Of course, we were attentive to everything there, being that we both had been at the Olympics. I found out that the Olympic torch was being carried through Minnesota, because all of the United Ways, which I used to work for, were in charge of the torch relays and publicity throughout all the country. My former boss and co-workers are now in charge of this and we'd maintained a friendship throughout my entire experience. They kept me abreast of everything, so we were excited about it. It just so happens that there were several different ways that torchbearers were selected, and the primary way was through a United Way program called 'Community Heros.' You had to be nominated, and based upon people's nominations, they selected so many people. It was based upon people's involvement and volunteer work in the community.

My brother nominated me, and I was actually selected through the United Way in St. Paul, which is where I worked. None of my co-workers were on the selection committee, but I was selected for that.

Allys: Did you know that he was going to nominate you?

Greta: Yes, I did know that. I actually nominated him, as well. Because he was in Minneapolis, I had to nominate him for Minneapolis. He nominated me through Askov because I was in transition at the time. I really, truly wanted him to carry the torch because I felt he did so much for me. I was actually visiting a friend in Hawaii when the selections came out, and went into the newspaper, and I got a phone call from my brother.

He said, 'Hey! Start running, you're carrying the torch!'

I said, 'Oh, you're kidding! Are you?'

He said, 'No.'

I thought, 'Well, why isn't he?' I was actually more disappointed than I was excited. I was just so bummed about that, and he was so excited. As soon as I got back I called my friends at United Way, and I said 'Can I give up this right and give it to him?' They wouldn't allow me to do it, and I was really bummed about that. I was bound and determined that he was going to carry the torch, too. I found out that Cub Foods was having drawings to give away a couple spots. I grabbed some entry forms, and each entry form and envelope that it went in had to be hand addressed. With the help of a friend at the time, we filled out and sent in two hundred and thirty-seven nomination forms, nominating Greg for this. We actually had two of them drawn. For the first one, my friend got a call, and so we made sure that he could do it. For the second one, I got a phone call and we gave it to this friend that had helped. Anyway, he got to carry the torch on Saturday night, and then I got to carry the torch the next morning. We got to see each other carry it.



It was fun. Once again, we got to share that, because there were a lot of festivities revolving around that, and we got each other involved in that, too. It was neat. My mom and dad won an all-expense paid trip to the Olympics that summer, also.

Allys: How did they win?

Greta: My dad was a Ford dealer, and Ford was a sponsor. Ford gave so much that received these trips. He was on an advertising board, and they had two drawings. Wouldn't you know it, his name got drawn. They had talked about it ahead of time, and said if they were drawn they were going to give it to my brother and I, so we could go. They weren't able to transfer it, though, so they went down there.

Allys: You went, too, didn't you?

Greta: No. I didn't go to the summer Olympics.

Allys: But you went to the next games in Japan

Greta: I was actually selected to be on the 1998 winter Greek Olympic team. I said, 'Okay. As soon as you pay me the money that you owe me and promised me from the last Olympics, I will continue on.' I never heard from them again. Well, the Olympics were a wonderful experience. It was two wonderful weeks; getting there was hell. I mean, it was very difficult. It was very lonely, and you have to make a lot of sacrifices but I just wasn't prepared to take another four years. I've got other dreams, obviously, and I've gone on to fulfill those other dreams. My brother, on the other hand, didn't have to make quite the commitment, in terms of quitting his job, and such. He did continue on, and went on to the 1998 Olympics. He was the driver again for the two-man, and the four-man team, that year, so I did go over and get to watch him. That was still very exciting.

Allys: Do you think he'll compete in the next Olympics?

Greta: No. He got married since then, and just had a baby.

Allys: So your Olympic adventures are over.

Greta: I think our Olympic adventures are over. There might be little opportunities here and there, every time the Olympics rolls around, little opportunities are created.

Allys: Well, I think you've gotten so much out of this experience. You've shared so many wonderful stories with the elementary students that you speak to and the college students that you speak with.

Greta: They're fun, because I love the kids to be very interactive. They lay on my sled and try on all the equipment. That's probably my favorite part of the experience.

Allys: Well you have one more distinction to add your credentials, and that is: quite certainly, you are the first St. Catherine's student to compete in the winter Olympics.

Greta: I think I am.

Allys: Oh, we now have a student here who is taking a leave of absence, an official leave of absence, to train for speed skating.

Greta: Really?

Allys: She made the [????] in the Olympics.

Greta: Well, that will be great! That'll be fun.

Allys: You'll have to start this connection. Pass the torch through the St. Catherine's students.

Greta: That's so funny.

Allys: Thank you very much, Greta. This has been a very, very delightful experience. All good wishes to you in the future.

Greta: Well, thanks for documenting it.